

# MID-AMERICA

*An Historical Review*

VOLUME 38, NUMBER 3

JULY 1956

# MID-AMERICA

*An Historical Review*

JULY 1956

VOLUME 38

NEW SERIES, VOLUME 27

NUMBER 3

---

## CONTENTS

JOHN BRIGHT AND THE BRITISH ATTITUDE TO THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR . . . . .	<i>Roman J. Zorn</i> 131
THE JEFFERSON DAVIS-WILLIAM H. BISSELL DUEL . . . . .	<i>Donald Fred Tingley</i> 146
ORESTES A. BROWNSON AND THE IRISH . . . . .	<i>Rev. Thomas R. Ryan, C.P.P.S.</i> 156
USE OF THE LOCAL PRESS IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH . . . . .	<i>Herman R. Lantz and J. S. McCrary</i> 173
"ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS" RECONSIDERED . . . . .	<i>P. J. Staudenraus</i> 180
BOOK REVIEW . . . . .	192

---

### MANAGING EDITOR

JEROME V. JACOBSEN, *Chicago*

### EDITORIAL STAFF

WILLIAM STETSON MERRILL  
J. MANUEL ESPINOSA  
W. EUGENE SHIELS

RAPHAEL HAMILTON  
PAUL KINIERY  
PAUL S. LIETZ

---

Published quarterly by Loyola University (The Institute of Jesuit History) at 50 cents a copy. Annual subscription, \$2.00; in foreign countries, \$2.50. Publication and editorial offices at Loyola University, 6525 Sheridan Road, Chicago 26, Illinois. All communications should be addressed to the Managing Editor. Entered as second class matter, August 7, 1929, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry as second class matter at the post office at Effingham, Illinois. Printed in the United States.

# MID-AMERICA

*An Historical Review*

JULY 1956

VOLUME 38

NEW SERIES, VOLUME 27

NUMBER 3

## John Bright and the British Attitude to the American Civil War

Even before the issues and character of the Civil War became clear, the British public began to discuss the implications of the American conflict. Humanitarians pointed to the antislavery possibilities involved in Northern victory, aristocrats openly avowed sympathy for the embattled Southern planters, and businessmen expressed fears that warfare would imperil the Lancashire textile industry as well as British commerce on the high seas. While these reactions echoed in the public forums, the British government issued a formal proclamation of neutrality on May 13, 1861.

Originally there was no strong preference for either American belligerent, but by early summer public sentiment drifted toward pro-Southern sympathy. Even the British liberals were being alienated by the North's reluctance to war against Negro slavery, and Northern fulminations at Britain's neutrality caused general irritation. Moreover, when the North suffered defeat at the battle of Bull Run, English observers began to doubt that the North could subdue the Confederacy. Since it appeared that the North was fighting only to reimpose political union and that the warfare would be prolonged, many Englishmen concluded that the North ought to abandon its efforts to prevent Southern independence.

While this prevailing attitude made England seem hostile to the Northern cause, John Bright emerged as the militant champion of the Union. For decades Bright had preached to England of the prosperity and freedom of the United States, and he had pointed to democratic institutions as the source of those blessings. Already committed to defense of the "American Experiment," Bright's

humanitarianism also led him to identify the Northern side with the cause of freedom. Thus, from the beginning of the secession crisis, John Bright did not hesitate in endorsement of "Mr. Lincoln's war."

But the pro-Southern English aristocracy denied Bright's postulates, and they seized upon the Civil War as an indictment of the American form of government. Forced upon the defensive by this onslaught, John Bright at first could do little but publicly urge Britain to observe strict neutrality toward the American belligerents. Thus, on May 28, 1861, Bright endorsed the ministry's neutrality proclamation, and he admonished Parliament to avoid all discussions that might increase the difficulty of maintaining that policy.<sup>1</sup> Two months later, in a by-election campaign speech, Bright emphasized that any intervention to break the blockade of the Southern ports would involve Britain in a costly and unjustifiable war with the United States. Pointing out that "the object of the Washington Government is to maintain their own Constitution . . . as it permits and requires," he warned that the people of England "will have no sympathy with those who wish to build up a great empire on the perpetual bondage of millions of their fellow-men."<sup>2</sup>

The Northern prospects darkened with continuing military reverses, and pro-Southern partisans renewed their attacks upon the Unionist cause. Temporarily disheartened by these developments, John Bright came to believe that the North would be obliged to accede to Southern secession.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while assuring his American friends of his continuing support, Bright privately confessed:

I cannot see how the South with its vast territory is to be subdued . . . I am hoping for something that will enable you to negotiate. I have no sympathy with the South, their folly seems to be extreme, and I think their leading men, who have made this insurrection, are traitors to human nature itself. They have sought to overthrow the most free Government and the noblest constitution the world has ever seen, and they wish to decree the perpetual bondage of many millions of human beings. . . . If you are ever again one nation I shall rejoice in your greatness; if your Northern states are henceforth to form your nation, I shall still have faith in your greatness, and rejoice in your renown.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech on May 28, 1861, Great Britain, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, CLXC, 192.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Rochdale, Aug. 1, 1861, in Frank Moore (ed.), *Speeches of John Bright, M. P., on the American Question*, Boston, 1865, 3, 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> John Bright to Richard Cobden, Sept. 6, 1861, in G. M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, London, 1913, 302.

<sup>4</sup> Bright to Senator Charles Sumner, Sept. 6, 1861, "Bright-Sumner Letters, 1861-1872" in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, XLVI (October, 1913), 93-97.



Throughout the autumn months, however, Anglo-American relationships continued to deteriorate. Trade-conscious Britons resented the Union blockade of Southern ports, and the "Rule Britannia" element clamored that English vessels need not respect an illegal Northern policy. Just when the blockade issue was becoming serious, in early November, 1861, the Union sloop *San Jacinto* intercepted the British steamer *Trent* in Caribbean waters. Only after removing two Confederate diplomats, James M. Mason and John Slidell, did the American commander, Captain Charles Wilkes, permit the *Trent* to continue its voyage.

When the news of this incident reached England, a great storm of indignation swept the country. Not only did the British resent the *Trent* Affair as a flagrant violation of their rights on the high seas, but they took offense because the Northern jubulations over the seizure of Confederate agents endorsed disrespect for the British flag. Public opinion became so aroused that it seemed unlikely that war could be averted, and the ministry brusquely demanded that the United States release the Confederate emissaries and submit a formal apology for Captain Wilke's conduct.<sup>5</sup>

While the threat of Anglo-American war persisted, John Bright urgently endorsed moderation and conciliation. As soon as the first wave of British anger subsided, Bright mounted the public platform to review the American question. Portraying the Northern States as the defenders of freedom, the orator pleaded for sympathetic understanding of their war problems. Bright deprecated the idea that the United States was seeking a quarrel with England, and he expressed confidence that the *Trent* Affair had come as a surprise to the Washington government. Declaring that only wickedness could distort that incident into a cause of war, Bright implored his countrymen to remain calm. In addition to this appeal to the British public, he privately urged patience and moderation upon his friends in the British ministry.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It was at this time that Henry Adams, son of the United States Ambassador to England, observed, "Our position here is of course very unpleasant just now.... This nation means to make war. Do not doubt it.... We have friends here still, but very few. Bright dined with us last night, and is with us, but... he is now wholly out of power and influence. Our friends are all very much cast down...." Letter to C. F. Adams, Jr., Nov. 30, 1861, in W. C. Ford (ed.), *A Cycle of Adams Letters 1861-1865*, 2 vols., Boston, 1920, I, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Speech at Rochdale, Dec. 4, 1861, in *The Times* (London), Dec. 6, 1861; Bright to J. Bigelow, Jan. 3, 1862, in R. B. O'Brien, *John Bright, A Monograph*, London, 1910, 145.

Simultaneously he endeavored to impress the Union regime with the need for displaying a conciliatory attitude. Transmitting his views via Senator Charles Sumner, Bright warned that British sentiment was dangerously belligerent, and he advised that the United States should propose arbitration of the *Trent* dispute.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, when Lincoln's cabinet met to consider a reply to the British diplomatic ultimatum, Senator Sumner was in attendance to convey a further admonition from John Bright. "If you are resolved to succeed against the South, *have no war with England*; make every concession that can be made; don't even hesitate to tell the world *that you will even concede what two years ago no Power would have asked of you*, rather than give another nation a pretence for assisting in the breaking up of your country."<sup>8</sup>

After pondering this advice, and similar recommendations by Secretary of State William H. Seward, the Northern Cabinet decided to release the Confederate commissioners. News of this outcome soon reached England, and there it was cordially received. Britain, having found the prospect of a Confederate alliance and involvement in American warfare none too pleasant, welcomed a costless diplomatic victory.

Bright hastened to report the British reaction to his American friends. "I need not tell you how much I rejoice, or how much I admire the dignity and tact with which the matter has been dealt with in the dispatch of your Government . . .," he wrote. "The war-mongers here are baffled for the time, and I cannot but believe that a more healthy opinion is gradually extending itself on all matters connected with your great struggle." The truth of this optimistic observation soon became apparent, for British sentiment began to display a pro-Northern reaction.<sup>9</sup>

Determined to force the government to recognize the new public mood, Bright precipitated new Parliamentary discussions concerning Anglo-American affairs. In conjunction with debates over appropriations for military contingents sent to Canada, he attacked the

<sup>7</sup> Bright to Sumner, Nov. 29, Dec. 5, 7, 14, 1861, in "Letters of John Bright, 1861-1862" in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLV, (November, 1912) 148-155. Sumner sent the letters to President Lincoln and the Cabinet. Edward L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 4 vols., Boston, 1894, IV, 147; *The Diaries of John Bright*, ed. by R. A. J. Walling, New York, 1931, 254-256, 290.

<sup>8</sup> Bright to Sumner, Dec. 14, 1861, in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLV, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Bright to Sumner, Jan. 11, 1862, in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLV, 156; Donaldson Jordan and Edwin Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War*, Boston, 1931, 46.

deployment of troops as a menace which had antagonized the United States. Furthermore, he emphasized that a majority of the public had grown friendly toward the Washington Government because they believed that through the Civil War the North was destined to free the 4,000,000 slaves in America.<sup>10</sup> Lord Palmerston spoke in defense of the ministry's policy, but his attitude was now noticeably moderate in tone. The general trend of debate proved favorable toward neutrality, and thereafter government policy was less belligerent toward the Union.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, slowly but steadily, the Northern blockade of Southern ports was disrupting Britain's cotton textile industry. The cotton mills were 80% dependent upon American raw materials, and even the large stock of raw cotton carried over from 1860 gradually dwindled. By December, 1861, the blockade had almost completely stopped importation of Confederate cotton, and thereafter the Lancashire mills either drastically curtailed production or completely suspended operations. These dislocations caused serious distress, either directly or indirectly, for approximately one-fifth of the British population.<sup>12</sup>

Resentment arising from the Lancashire depression found expression in demands that England forcibly break the naval blockade and thus restore access to Southern cotton. In early 1862, therefore, John Bright again felt it advisable to mitigate growing public hostility. In a widely publicized speech before the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, he discussed the cotton famine and restated the case for neutrality toward the United States. Citing his Parliamentary speeches of 1847 and 1850, in which he had warned that dependence upon a slave-produced cotton supply was dangerous and that cotton production in India should be developed, Bright contended that neglect of those admonitions had contributed to Lancashire's plight. Now that the Northern blockade had proved effective and therefore legal, he warned his countrymen not to provoke a war with the Northern States. In a strong peroration Bright concluded:

<sup>10</sup> Speech on Feb. 17, 1862, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, CLXV, 382-387.

<sup>11</sup> *Diaries of John Bright*, 257; Bright to Sumner, Feb. 27, 1862, in *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proceedings*, XLVI, 102-105.

Henry Adams observed, "Parliament has met and the speeches have been very favorable to neutrality. I think our work here is past its crisis. The insurgents will receive no aid from Europe, and so far are beaten. Our victory is won on this side the water. . . . John Bright is my favorite Englishman. He is very pleasant, cheerful and courageous and much more sanguine than I have usually been. . . ." Letter to C. F. Adams, Jr., Feb. 14, 1862, in *Cycle of Adams Letters*, I, 113.

I say nothing could be more ignorant or foolish than the idea that the United States as at present existing and governed from Washington is a power to be treated as though it formed a few disconnected provinces, a prey to anarchy, which anybody may insult and injure at his pleasure. I believe I speak the sentiment of the merchants, manufacturers, spinners, and work-people of Lancashire when I say that... any of those schemes of interference and war which certain politicians and newspapers advocate would not only be perilous but absolutely fatal to the interests of our country. If cotton be now 1s. per lb., you could not get it from America through war at less than 5s. per lb. And if there be families—and I know there are hundreds, and, perhaps, thousands—who scarcely know where to-morrow's food is to come from, still it would be cheaper... to subsidize them till better times come round, rather than engage in an unjust and violent attempt to break a legal blockade, and to declare war against a people anxious to be friendly with us... I believe the interests of Lancashire at this moment depend on a perfect, and, I should add friendly, neutrality on the part of our Government.<sup>13</sup>

However, the cotton famine continued to cause restivity, and by spring the Union blockade became a political issue. In March pro-Southern politicians brought an antiblockade resolution before the House of Commons, but the debates proved inconclusive and the proposal failed to secure passage. This failure notwithstanding, in June there was debate upon a motion advocating mediation of the American warfare and recognition of the Confederacy. Again the requisite majority was lacking; and after final consideration was postponed, the resolution was ultimately withdrawn. Despite the Parliamentary maneuvers of 1862, the policy of neutrality prevailed.<sup>14</sup>

Month by month, however, the Lancashire crisis intensified. The cotton mills had been running on reduced time since October, and by April the operatives were averaging only half time employment. In September there was only a three week's supply of raw cotton in the warehouses, almost all of the factories had stopped production, and over 400,000 mill hands were unemployed. By late 1862 four-fifths of the cotton workers had been reduced to dependence upon charity, and at least 2,000,000 Britons suffered privations traceable to the cotton famine.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *The Times*, Sept. 19, 1861; J. H. Park, "The English Workingmen and the American Civil War," in *Political Science Quarterly*, XXXIX (Sept., 1924), 432-433.

<sup>14</sup> Speech at Birmingham, Feb. 5, 1862, *The Times*, Feb. 6, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> *Diaries of John Bright*, 258; Ephraim D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (2 vols., London, 1925), I, 268-272.

<sup>16</sup> F. L. Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, Chicago, 1931, 149, 153-154, 157-158.

With one-third of England's industrial population unemployed and destitute, public opinion naturally focused upon the cause of the crisis. Few Englishmen believed that the American nation could be forcibly reunited, and the London press now clamored for governmental intervention to stop the American warfare. By autumn Lords Palmerston and Russell were ready to adopt this policy, and in October even the great Liberal, William E. Gladstone, publicly declared, "There is no doubt that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more than either—they have made a nation. . . . We may anticipate with certainty the success of the Southern States so far as regards their separation from the North."<sup>16</sup>

This situation caused John Bright to multiply his efforts as the champion of the Northern cause. Realizing that the attitude of Lancashire would be crucial in determining any departure from British neutrality, Bright virtually deserted his seat in Parliament to rally the distressed industrial masses in support of the North. Throughout the last half of 1862, therefore, he indefatigably proclaimed that the freedom of the British workingman hinged upon the preservation of the American Union.

The climax of this campaign came in Bright's speech in Birmingham on December 17. Not only did he discuss the salient aspects of the cotton famine, but he eloquently repudiated British intervention in the American hostilities. Answering those who demanded immediate reopening of access to American cotton, he asserted that such proposals were futile because wartime chaos had prevented any extensive production of cotton in the South and because "there never will be again in America a crop of cotton grown by slave labour." He contended that the welfare of Lancashire could only be safeguarded by the development of adequate cotton acreage in India; and to those impatient at the delay involved, he

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, Oct. 9, 1862; Bright to Sumner, Oct. 10, 1862, in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLVI, 108-110.

Bright's reaction to this speech was bitter: "You will see what is being said here by public men who speak on your question, and most of all, and *worst of all*, by your old acquaintance and friend, Mr. Gladstone. He has made a vile speech at Newcastle, full of insulting pity for the North, and of praise and support for the South. He is unstable as water in some things. He is for union and freedom in Italy, and for disunion and bondage in America. . . . I have known for months past that he talked of an European remonstrance, or mediation, or recognition, or some mischief of that kind, but I did not expect that he would step out openly as the defender and eulogist of Jeff. Davis and his fellow conspirators against God and man." Letter to Sumner, Oct. 10, 1862, in *Ibid.*, XLVI, 108-110.



replied that "100 years of crime against the Negroes in America and against the docile natives of India are not to be washed away by the sufferings and penitence of an hour."

Turning to a discussion of the American warfare, Bright declared that the South had no just cause for disrupting the American nation and he described the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter as an overt act of aggression. In contrast to this justification of the Northern war effort, the orator made a slashing attack upon the Confederacy:

If, however, we come to the point of sympathy for the South, or recognition of her, or mediation, or intervention, we should consider what is her aim. . . . Is there a man here who doubts for a moment that the aim of the South is to maintain and perpetuate the bondage of four millions of human beings? Yes, her object is to make secure that a handful of white men on that Continent shall lord it over millions of men made black by the very hand that made us white. Her object is to retain the powers to breed negroes, to lash negroes, to chain them, to buy and sell negroes, to deny them the enjoyment of the commonest family ties, to break their hearts by rending them at pleasure, to close their mental eye against a glimpse of that knowledge which separates us from brute creation. . . . I wish to know, then, whether this is to be made the foundation as is promised of a new slave empire, whether it is intended that on this audacious and infernal basis a new alliance for England is to be built up. . . .

Then, after denouncing Britain's statesmen and journalists for their refusal to support the cause of freedom, Bright concluded with an eloquent appeal to both the laboring class and the liberal minded citizenry:

Despite the aristocracy's pleasure in the prospective disintegration of the American republic, I maintain, after all, that the people do not err. Free states are the home of the workingman. . . . In America there are no six millions of grown men excluded by the Constitution from political rights; there is a free church, free schools, a free hand, a free vote, a free career for the child of the humblest. . . . The leaders of this revolt propose by their constitution this simple thing—that over a territory some forty times as large as England the blight and bondage of slavery shall be forever perpetuated. I cannot myself believe in such a fate befalling that fair land, stricken though it now be with the ravages of war; I cannot believe that civilization in its journey with the sun will sink into endless night to gratify the ambitions of the leaders of this revolt, who seek 'to wade through slaughter to a throne, and shut the gates of mercy on mankind.' I have another and far brighter vision before my gaze. It may be but a vision, but I will still cherish it. I see one vast confederation stretching from the frozen North in one unbroken line to the glowing South, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic to the calmer waters of the Pacific main, and I see one people



and one law and one language and one faith, and over that wide continent the home of freedom and a refuge for the oppressed of every race.<sup>17</sup>

Not content with his speech making role, John Bright initiated other propaganda maneuvers. In collaboration with W. E. Forster, he organized a series of pro-Northern meetings in the textile district.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, to offset antiblockade mobilizations, he invited American contributions of foodstuffs for charitable distribution among the starving mill hands. "If a few cargoes of flour could come, say 50,000 barrels, as a gift from persons in your Northern States to the Lancashire working-men," he suggested, "... such a token of your good will would cover with confusion all those who talk against you."<sup>19</sup> Soon thereafter a Northern public subscription raised funds to send three shiploads of flour to Britain. The distribution of these cargoes enabled Bright to direct attention to Northern friendship for the British laboring classes, and it provided occasion for another mass meeting which expressed the gratitude of Lancashire's unemployed.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Bright-Forster agitation effectively checkmated hostility toward the North, many Britons remained dubious about the Union government's antislavery zeal. In September of 1862, however, President Lincoln announced his intention to liberate all slaves in those areas which continued in a state of rebellion. Thereafter British popular sentiment veered in favor of the Union cause.

After Lincoln formally published his Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, sizeable crowds joined in pro-Union demonstrations in the major cities. Not only was Bright a conspicuous participant in many of these mass meetings, but he also served as a spokesman to present resolutions of commendation to the United States embassy.<sup>21</sup> The cumulative effect of this agitation caused Henry Adams to report, "The Emancipation Proclamation has done more for us here than all our former victories and all our diplomacy. It is creating an almost convulsive reaction in our favor all over this country."<sup>22</sup> By February John Bright also felt confident that

<sup>17</sup> Speech at Birmingham, Dec. 17, 1862, *The Times*, Dec. 18, 1862.

<sup>18</sup> Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 188, 566.

<sup>19</sup> Bright to Sumner, Dec. 6, 1862, in *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proceedings*, XLV, 110-112.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, Feb. 4, 1863; John Watts, *Facts of the Cotton Famine*, London, 1866, n.p.

<sup>21</sup> *Diaries of John Bright*, 262; Park, *English Workingmen and American Civil War*, 437, 438.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to C. F. Adams, Jr., Jan. 23, 1863, in *Cycle of Adams Letters*, I, 243. His father, the U. S. ambassador, expressed a similar conclusion. C. F. Adams to C. F. Adams, Jr., Jan. 23, 1863, *Ibid.*, I, 236.

there was solid ground for optimism. "Opinion here has changed greatly," he enthused to an American friend. "In almost every town great meetings are being held to pass resolutions in favor of the North, and the advocates of the South are pretty much put down."<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, new neutrality issues were creating another Anglo-American crisis. In 1862 the South had contracted with the Laird shipyards for the construction of several commerce raiders, and by summer the first vessel was nearly ready for delivery. Presenting evidence that "No. 299" was soon to become the Confederate warship *Alabama*, the U. S. Ambassador officially called Lord John Russell's attention to this violation of the Foreign Enlistment Act. But governmental procrastination allowed the *Alabama* to depart on July 29, 1862; and thereafter this ship wreaked havoc upon Northern merchantmen. As reports of the *Alabama's* depredations reached America, the North became enraged. The Union press fulminated against England's unneutrality and Ambassador Charles Francis Adams harassed the Foreign Office with claims for damages. These protests, however, proved of no avail. Indeed, at the height of the *Alabama* crisis, Confederate agents contracted for construction of two ironclad rams specially designed to attack the Northern blockade squadrons.<sup>24</sup>

The intensity of Anglo-Union tension soon induced the "Champion of the North" to renew his propaganda activities. Urging his fellow citizens to reevaluate their government's policy, Bright presented the *Alabama* question from the Northern perspective. "In America they say, I know not how truly, that she is a ship of war which was built by a member of the British Parliament, furnished with guns and ammunition of English manufacture, manned and sailed almost exclusively by Englishmen. . . . She has never been in a Confederate port. She hoists the English flag when she wants to come alongside any ship . . . and afterwards robs and burns it."<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, in other speeches, Bright warned that the *Alabama* affair contained the seeds of an unjustifiable war. The South would

<sup>23</sup> Bright to Cyrus W. Field, Feb. 27, 1863, in Trevelyan, *Life of Bright*, 321. In an earlier letter he had declared, "You will see what meetings are being held here in favor of your emancipation policy, and of the North in general. I think in every town in the Kingdom a public meeting would go by an overwhelming majority in favor of President Lincoln and of the North." Bright to Sumner, Jan. 30, in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLVI, 113-114.

<sup>24</sup> Douglas H. Maynard, "Union efforts to prevent the escape of the *Alabama*," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLI (June, 1954) 46-51.

<sup>25</sup> Speech in Birmingham, Dec. 18, *The Times*, Dec. 19, 1862.

manipulate the situation to involve Britain in the American hostilities, he contended, and Englishmen must beware lest they find themselves engaged in warfare which could perpetuate human slavery.<sup>26</sup>

Simultaneously, near the end of March, the critics of the ministry's policy opened Parliamentary debate upon the issues involved in British construction of Confederate war vessels. In these debates Bright sharply attacked the government for its "cold and unfriendly neutrality" toward the United States, and he denounced the construction of the Laird rams as "just as nefarious as the building of the *Alabama* was." Warning that such policies jeopardized future Anglo-American amity, he urged the Ministry "to prevent the sailing of these vessels which . . . [will] embroil us with that nation. . . ."<sup>27</sup> Other speakers joined in heated discussion of Britain's neutrality, and the repercussions echoed outside the House of Commons. The cumulative effect of attacks upon national policy, however, caused a considerable stirring of British chauvinism. Increasingly the public displayed antagonism to pro-Union complaints, and even Bright had to admit that the debates had been "badly managed and told against us."<sup>28</sup>

Thereafter, while Northern military fortunes declined to their nadir, pro-Southerners agitated for diplomatic recognition of the Confederate States of America. Ultimately J. A. Roebuck introduced a Parliamentary resolution endorsing this policy, and he bulwarked his case by pledging that Napoleon III would collaborate in Confederate recognition. Bright immediately launched a bitter counter-attack. Not only did he remind the House of Commons that Roebuck had earlier described Napoleon III as perjured, untrustworthy, and hostile to Britain, but he further declared that diplomatic intervention would embroil England in the American war. Moreover, if the South should thereby attain independence, Bright warned that England would share responsibility for reenslavement of Negroes freed by Lincoln's emancipation policy and that Lancashire would be returned to dependence upon a precarious slave-produced cotton supply. This powerful indictment effectively doomed the pro-Confederate resolution. Though the eloquent Gladstone replied that Northern efforts to restore the Union were certain to fail,

<sup>26</sup> Speeches at Rochdale on Feb. 3 and at London, March 26. *Ibid.*, Feb. 4, March 27, 1863.

<sup>27</sup> Speech on March 27, 1863, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, CLXX, 62-67.

<sup>28</sup> Bright to Sumner, April 4, 1863, in *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proceedings*, XLVI, 114-115.

Roebuck's motion was saved from defeat only by the adjournment of Parliament.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, outside the House of Commons, Bright strove to unite both workingmen and middle-class liberals into an active pro-Northern coalition. Repeatedly he mounted the public platform to proclaim that the Union cause represented a crusade for the preservation of human rights and liberties. He reiterated that the South had launched an unjustified rebellion, and he reaffirmed that the Confederacy was primarily dedicated to the perpetuation of slavery. In the South the relationships between capital and labor were solved by making labor a form of property, hence a Southern triumph would challenge the ideal of an equalitarian society wherever it might exist. Only in the Northern States of America, Bright reminded his compatriots, had the common man achieved full personal and political rights. Pointing to a mutual interest in the maintenance of free institutions, the orator urged that the Union cause deserved British admiration, gratitude, and friendship.<sup>30</sup>

These propaganda efforts reached their climax in his address to the London Trade Unions. Designed "to widen... [the American] question and to show its transcendent importance to labor all over the world,"<sup>31</sup> it did much to convince Englishmen that the North was fighting the battle of democracy. Here, scaling new peaks of oratorical effectiveness, he proclaimed:

It is... a question of a whole continent with its teeming millions, and what shall be their present and their future fate. It is for those millions, and among them, a question of freedom or slavery, education or ignorance, light or darkness, Christian morality or an overshadowing and all-blasting guilt....

Let us take the two sections of the country which are now engaged in this fearful struggle. In the one, labour is honoured more than elsewhere in the world; there, more than in any other country, men rise to competence and independence, and no honest pursuit is thwarted by the law. In the other section labour is not only not honoured, but it is degraded; there the labourer is made a chattel; he is no more his own master than the horse that drags the omnibus through the next street... [already there are those who hold] that it is not the black man only who should be a slave....

You wish for freedom... [hence] do not think of giving the hand

<sup>29</sup> Speech on June 30, 1863, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, CLXXI, 1824-1838; *Diaries of J. Bright*, 265-266.

<sup>30</sup> Speeches delivered at Rochdale on Feb. 3, at the London Trades Unions meeting on March 26, and for the Union and Emancipation Society. See *The Times*, Feb. 4, March 27, June 17, 1863.

<sup>31</sup> Bright to Sumner, April 4, 1863, in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLVI, 114-115.

of friendship or of fellowship to the worst foes of freedom the world has ever seen. . . . I have faith in you. Impartial history will tell that when your statesmen were hostile or coldly neutral—when many of your rich men were corrupt, when your press has been mainly written to betray your faith in that vast continent whose population are of your own kindred—you clung to freedom with unfaltering trust; and be assured that God in his mercy will yet make it the heritage of all His children.<sup>32</sup>

The response to such overtures was encouraging, and Bright felt that he could take a vacation from public agitation. Nevertheless, since the American military situation remained crucial, he carefully studied the British reaction to each new battle. When Vicksburg and Gettysburg seemed to turn the tide in favor of the North, Bright broke a long silence to report his observations to his American friends. "Our press is being converted, our Government will be civil, and our Secessionists will become ashamed of themselves . . .," he wrote. "You will hear by this mail that the ironclad steam rams are detained by the Government . . . I suppose the changed position of your affairs has helped our Foreign Office to the decision they have come to!"<sup>33</sup> Bright continued his policy of quiet vigilance, and by autumn he noted a marked decline in anti-Northern sentiment. To Senator Sumner he commented, "Neutrality is agreed upon by all, and I hope a more fair or friendly neutrality than we have seen during the past two years. There are still heard some voices against you . . . but I can see and feel all around me that another tone prevails and that the confident predictions as to your failure are uttered much less frequently even by the most rash of your opponents."<sup>34</sup>

By 1864 the critical period of Anglo-Union relations was over. A series of factors—Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Bright's propaganda campaign of 1863, and the Northern military victories—had combined to undercut pro-Southern sentiment in England. Henceforth Britain was disposed to maintain neutrality toward the American belligerents.

Well aware of this state of affairs, John Bright nevertheless continued to guard Northern interests. Returning to the public platform in January, he delivered a strong warning that England must not backslide in its neutrality. Shortly thereafter Parliament

<sup>32</sup> Speech at the London Trades Unions meeting, March 26, 1863, *The Times*, March 27, 1863.

<sup>33</sup> Bright to Sumner, Sept. 11, 1863, in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings*, XLVI, 124-126.

<sup>34</sup> Bright to Sumner, Nov. 20, 1863, *Ibid.*, XLVI, 126-127.



again convened, and Bright resumed his seat in the House of Commons. Then, when J. A. Roebuck revived a proposal for British recognition of the Confederacy, he presented a devastating rebuttal. Thereafter the pro-Confederates relinquished their efforts for Parliamentary interventionism, and Bright was content to resume a policy of watchful waiting.<sup>35</sup>

By early 1865 the Union cause had gained considerable ground in England. The cumulative impact of Bright's propaganda, bolstered by major Northern military victories, had consolidated Britain's workingman and middle class liberals into a strong pro-Northern popular front. Rejoicing at this fruition of his hopes, Bright felt certain that England would henceforth spurn all pro-Confederate proposals. "Opinion now is becoming unanimous that the South cannot win, and by and by all will wish the rebels would at once submit. . . .," he reassured Sumner. Several weeks later, deprecating the possibility of European intervention in the American hostilities, he declared: "*All parties and classes here are resolved on a strict neutrality, and I believe there is an honest intention that no further cause of irritation or quarrel shall come from this side.*"<sup>36</sup>

As the Civil War neared an end, however, a few Britons expressed fears that Union grievances might ultimately beget an Anglo-American war. Fearing that such agitation might encourage eleventh-hour pro-Southern Confederacy interventionism, John Bright felt it advisable to offer a public refutation. In a vigorous and witty speech, he freely criticized Britain's recent unneutrality but he also expressed confidence that the Union government would refrain from retaliations.<sup>37</sup>

Very soon, however, England received word of the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. Now that the Southern rebellion was over, John Bright wrote a personal valedictory. In his diary he observed:

This may be taken to be the end of the great and wicked rebellion. Slavery has measured itself with Freedom, and Slavery has perished in the struggle. How often have I longed and prayed for this result, and how much have I suffered from anxiety while it has been slowly working out, I only know! This great triumph of the Republic is the event of our age, and future ages will confess it, for they will be better able than . . . [we]

<sup>35</sup> Speech at Birmingham, Jan. 26, 1864, in *The Times*, Jan. 27, 1864; *Diaries of John Bright*, 272, 282; Bright to Sumner, Sept. 2, 1864, *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proceedings*, XLVI, 128-131.

<sup>36</sup> Bright to Sumner, Jan. 26, Feb. 17, 1865, *Ibid.*, XLVI, 132-136.

<sup>37</sup> Speech of March 13, 1865, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, CLXXVII, 1614-1634.



to estimate the gain to freedom and humanity which will spring from it. I have had an almost unflinching faith from the beginning, and I now rejoice more than I can tell that the cause of personal freedom and free government has triumphed. The friends of freedom everywhere should thank God and take courage. They may believe that the world is not forsaken by Him who made and rules it."<sup>38</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Though John Bright was not the only Englishman who aided the Union government, he was the pre-eminent champion of the Northern cause. When the press, the oligarchic leaders, and the Parliament made England appear favorable to the South, Bright capably and courageously campaigned for British neutrality. In the House of Commons he led efforts that checkmated pro-Confederate schemes, and from the public platform he rallied support for the North in the name of human rights and liberties. Of all the British voices raised in behalf of the Union cause, John Bright's was the most eloquent, the most positive and unflinching, and by far the most influential.

ROMAN J. ZORN

University of Wisconsin

<sup>38</sup> *Diaries of John Bright*, 289-290.

## The Jefferson Davis-William H. Bissell Duel

During the heat of the debate on the Compromise of 1850 an exchange between Jefferson Davis, Senator from Mississippi, and William H. Bissell, Representative from Illinois, nearly resulted in a duel between the two men and occasioned much political comment. Out of this political comment, primarily by Illinois journalists, grew a considerable legend of the bravery of Bissell. A letter written by Davis describing the incident was recently turned up in the Illinois State Historical Library. Since the incident is mentioned prominently in most of the histories of the times, it is worth examining the known facts, the growth of the legend, and finally what Jefferson Davis recalled of the incident many years later.

The incident grew out of a speech by Representative James A. Seddon of Virginia on January 23, 1850, on the floor of the House of Representatives. Seddon, commenting on the bravery and chivalry of the South, spoke as follows:

And on that memorable field of Buena Vista, at that most critical juncture, when all seemed lost save honor, again should his heart bound with hope as he [Zachary Taylor] hailed the approach of the noble regiment of Mississippians, and beheld them steady and undismayed (through the very midst of the brave but unfortunate troops of the North, then, through a mistaken order discomfited and in rout,) with souls untouched by panic, and nerved to do or die, march onward—right onward on the countless foe, and with the invincible prowess snatch from the very jaws of death rescue and victory.<sup>1</sup>

Seddon was commenting on the bravery of the Mississippi regiment commanded by Jefferson Davis and on the feeling of General Zachary Taylor as Davis, his son-in-law, allegedly charged up and saved a lost cause.

Almost a month later, as the debate went on, Congressman Albert G. Brown of Mississippi in a speech estimated that there were eight million freemen in the South. At this point Bissell arose and remarked that this was an exaggeration and that there were actually only about half that number. He referred to this as an example of "the proneness of our southern friends to exaggerate all their capabilities." In the course of his speech, he went on to say:

---

<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., Vol. 22, Appendix, part 1, 78. 146

This proneness, however, is not always harmless; and I must now refer to a subject which I would gladly have avoided. I allude to the claim put forth for a southern regiment, by the gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. Seddon] of having met and repulsed the enemy on the field of Buena Vista, and at that most critical moment when the second Indiana regiment, through an unfortunate order of their colonel, gave way, justice to the living, as well as to those who fell on that occasion, demand of me a prompt correction of this most erroneous statement, and I affirm distinctly sir, and such is the fact, that at the time the Second Indiana Regiment gave way, the Mississippi regiment, for whom this claim is thus gratuitously set up, was not within a mile and a half of the scene of action; nor had it as yet fired a gun, or drawn a trigger. I affirm further, sir, that the troops which at that time met and registered the enemy, and thus, to use the gentleman's own language, "snatched victory from the jaws of defeat," were the second Kentucky, the second Illinois, and a portion of the first Illinois regiments.

In all this, however, I by no means detract from the gallant conduct and bearing of the Mississippi regiment. At other times and places on that bloody field, they did all that their warmest admirers could have desired.<sup>2</sup>

Almost immediately rumors began to circulate that Jefferson Davis, always proud of his military career, had challenged Bissell. The news was slow to make its way into the hinterlands and Illinois newspapers had to make shift with the barest facts for a time. Five days after Bissell's speech, the *Springfield Daily Register* carried a little squib on the matter:

#### A DUEL—COL. BISSELL & JEFF DAVIS

Washington, Feb. 26

There is a duel arrayed between Col. Bissell of Illinois and Col. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, for remarks of the former in the house, in regard to the battle of Buena Vista—both good shots, and both may be killed. Strong efforts are making to reconcile the parties.<sup>3</sup>

The affair had been settled before there was any mention of the matter again in Springfield. On March 6, 1850, the *Washington Daily National Intelligencer* printed in full the speech of Bissell and then printed three letters contributed by the friends of the two antagonists. The first of the letters was to explain the last two:

Washington, Feb. 27, 1850

Gentlemen: In order to remove any erroneous impressions which may have been made on the public mind, by the surmises of letter writers, in relation to a correspondence which has passed between Col. Davis and Col. Bissell, we take the liberty of requesting you to publish the following correspondence

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., Vol. 22, Appendix, part 1, 228.

<sup>3</sup> *Springfield (Illinois) Daily Register*, February 27, 1850, 2.

which will show that the matter has been most honorably adjusted to the gratification of their mutual friends

Jas. Shields  
S. W. Inge.

Then follows the letter of inquiry of Jefferson Davis:

Washington, February 22, 1850

Sir: I am informed that in yesterday's debate you asserted that at the time it was claimed for the Mississippi regiment, on the field of Buena Vista, to have passed through the scattered files of the 2d Indiana regiment, and to have met the Mexican forces, who had routed and were pursuing that regiment, the Mississippi regiment was not within one mile and a half of that particular spot.

Not having been able to find a "report" of your remarks, and being the proper person to answer any charge which a responsible man may make against the Mississippi regiment referred to, I take this mode of asking whether the information I have received is correct.

Yours Respectfully,  
Jeff Davis

Hon. Mr. Bissell

Then follows a reply from Bissell:

Washington, February 22, 1850

Sir: In your note of this date you inquire whether I asserted, in yesterday's debate, that "at the time . . . [follows a quotation from the above note from Jefferson Davis] that particular spot."

The best answer I can give to your inquiry is to state what I did say, which was this: That, "*at the time the 2nd Indiana gave way, the Mississippi regiment was not within a mile and a half of the scene of action.*" This substantially was all I said in reference to the *Mississippi regiment*. I also said that the 2nd Kentucky, 2nd Illinois, and a portion of the 1st Illinois regiments, were the troops that, at that time, met and repulsed the advancing columns of the enemy. In my remarks, I referred to what occurred at "that particular spot" at that point of time.

Having answered your inquiry, I deem it due, in justice to myself and the Mississippi regiment, to say that I made no charge against that regiment, but am willing to award them the credit due to their gallant and distinguished services in that battle. My only object was to do justice to the character of others, living and dead, whose conduct fell under my observation on that occasion—a duty imposed upon me by remarks previously made in the course of the same debate.

Very respectfully yours, etc.  
W. H. Bissell.<sup>4</sup>

Hon. Jeff Davis.

<sup>4</sup> *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, March 6, 1850, 1-2. The same correspondence also appeared in the *Washington Union* on February 28 and was eventually reprinted in the *Springfield, Illinois, papers. Springfield Daily Journal*, March 13, 1850, 2. *Springfield Daily Register*, March 12, 1850, 2.

These are the facts as they were known at the time. Due to the eagerness of Illinois and the slowness with which the facts trickled to Illinois the Springfield papers printed almost every account that could reach them. The legend began to grow. On March 6, 1850, the *Daily Register* printed an account which had come to them by the "telegraph" in which it was said that the difficulty had been settled by intervention of President Zachery Taylor. The *Register* went on to say that the terms of the duel were "muskets—fifteen paces." They also remarked that since both men were good shots the duel would "probably have terminated [sic] fatally to both."<sup>5</sup> The following day the *Journal* carried another account of "THE GALLANT BISSELL" in which, although he admitted that he had not seen an account of it, the editor went on to describe the speech: "He touched up the chivalry in beautiful style. He said he was tired of hearing the eternal ding dong of Southern chivalry."<sup>6</sup> The same day the *Register* printed stories from the *Louisville Journal* and the *Baltimore American*. These were reasonable accounts of the speeches of both Seddon and Bissell.<sup>7</sup> On March 8, 1850, the *Register* added to the legend as follows:

Col. Bissell's speech.—The speech of Col. Bissell, alluded to in our yesterday's paper, has not yet been received, although it was delivered on the 20th. It is spoken of by the papers as a brilliant effort. A letter from one of his colleagues to us, received last night, says: "It is admitted by everybody to be the best speech delivered this session.—50,000 copies of it were subscribed for within ten minutes after he concluded."<sup>8</sup>

As time went on the affair still claimed the interest of Illinois. The *Register* on March 11 reported a speech of Col. E. D. Baker in which he backed the position of Bissell and "gave a thrilling account of that gentleman's heroism at Buena Vista."<sup>9</sup> Then on March 12 and 13 both Springfield papers reprinted the correspondence that had appeared in the Washington papers. On March 14 the *Register* carried another account which had come out of Washington, of speeches which had occasioned the disagreement, and then described the correspondence thus:

On Friday Mr. Inge of Alabama, bore a note from Col. Davis to Col. Bissell, in which he enumerated a long rigmarole as to what he had under-

<sup>5</sup> *Springfield Daily Register*, March 6, 1850, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Springfield Daily Journal*, March 7, 1850, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Springfield Daily Register*, March 7, 1850, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, March 8, 1850, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, March 11, 1850, 2.



stood Col. Bissell had said in his speech, touching the Mississippi regiment, and inquiring, of him, whether he had made such statements. To this Col. Bissell replied in a frank, manly manner, that he could answer best his note, by setting out what he did say, upon the occasion to which Col. Davis had alluded. He then gave, word for word, all that was uttered by him, and his note was borne to Mr. Inge as the friend of Davis, by Gen. Shields. On Saturday, a second note was conveyed to Col. Bissell [sic] through the same channel, saying in effect that the Mississippi regiment claimed, in the language of Brigd. Gen. Lane's report having saved the fortunes of the day, and the inquiry was categorically put to Col. Bissell, whether he had disputed the claim. The same night, Col. Bissell replied, that the action to which he alluded in his speech was at an entirely different period in the battle, from that upon which Gen. Lane had based the report to which Col. Davis alluded, and that as a matter of course he did not call in question, the report of Gen. Lane. This note was kept under consideration some little while in which I have good reason for believing and saying Mr. Brown of Mississippi, and Mr. Dawson of Georgia, were consulted in addition to Mr. Inge, when the note was returned to Gen. Shields as the friend of Col. Bissell as not being satisfactory. The friend of Davis was informed, that Col. Bissell had no other reply to make, and today it is expected that Davis will send Bissell a challenge. I need not say to you, you know Col. Bissell as well as I do, that it will be promptly accepted, and the meeting fixed at an early day.<sup>10</sup>

On March 22, 1850, a full month after Bissell's speech, it was again reprinted in full in the *Register* where it was described as "a lofty production" which had marked Bissell "as one of the ablest men of the House."<sup>11</sup>

After this the matter was allowed to rest for some six years. In 1856 Bissell was standing for election to the Governorship of Illinois as the candidate of the newly-formed Republican Party. At this point the Bissell-Davis affair was recalled and used as campaign propaganda to further the interests of Bissell. Now the legend began to take on really heroic proportions. The *Journal* reprinted a story from the *Chicago Democratic Press*:

The disunionists, enraged at the telling character of his analysis of the slavery question, at its rigid and unanswerable logic, seized upon his remarks relative to that hotly-contested field as a pretext for silencing so bold and able an opponent. Jefferson Davis, the present Secretary of War, then a U. S. Senator from Mississippi was selected by the south for this purpose. A challenge was forthwith dispatched to Col. Bissell, and as promptly accepted. Washington City was on the *qui vive*. 'Will he accept?' 'Will he stand fire?' Western men, who knew him, said 'Yes.' Some who

<sup>10</sup> *Springfield Daily Register*, March 14, 1850, 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, March 22, 1850, 1, 4.



had shared with him the perils and hard fighting of the Mexican campaign, said 'Yes' with such indignant emphasis that the query was not repeated to them.

But there were northerners at Washington, who did not know the metal of the man, and those men were doubtful as to the reception that would be given to the hostile message from Davis. Daniel Webster was of this number. He came into the hall of the House. 'Introduce me to Bissell of Illinois,' said he to a member whom he knew, 'I wish to look into his eye.'—Bissell was called. The two grasped hands heartily, and Webster withdrew with a more elastic tread and a deeper light gleaming from his eye than usual. 'He will do,' said he to a high dignitary of Government, who knew what had taken Webster into the House, 'the South has mistaken its man.'

Bissell left all preliminaries to his friends except weapons and distance—those he should determine upon himself. Muskets loaded with buckshot—thirty paces.' The Southern fireaters were amazed. They realized the soundness of Webster's judgment—they had indeed 'mistaken their man.' What could now be done? There was no retraction in Bissell. 'I have defended my brave Illinoisans,' said he against their calumniators. 'They stood nobly by me on the heights of Buena Vista, and I will stand by them here.' The chivalry saw there was nothing for it but 'musket and buckshot at thirty paces,' or back down. They wisely chose the latter.

The article was concluded with the plea: "People of Illinois, will you stand by the man who under all circumstances has stood by you, or will you support his competitor for office who now affiliates politically with those who sought the destruction of our gallant Bissell."<sup>12</sup>

Bissell was in due course elected Governor by the people of Illinois, becoming the first of a long line of Republican governors. The *Journal*, however, had cause to regret its part in perpetuating the legend. The Constitution of Illinois of 1848, then in effect, had a provision whereby any elective or appointive official of the state had to take an oath that he had not "fought a duel, nor sent or accepted a challenge to fight a duel."<sup>13</sup> In November, after the election, the *Journal* printed a query which had appeared in the *Joliet (Illinois) Signal* in which the latter paper asked whether Bissell would commit perjury by taking the oath that he had not been involved in the duel. At this point the *Journal* implied that no such challenge had been issued and asked rather angrily why, if such a challenge had been issued, it had not been published and

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Illinois State Journal*, July 29, 1856, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Article XIII, Section 26.

if such proof was available why Jefferson Davis had not been arrested for violation of the law against duelling and challenging to a duel in the District of Columbia.<sup>14</sup> Whatever his feelings may have been on the matter, Bissell took the oath and was duly inaugurated as governor of Illinois.

Later historians picked up the legend and perpetuated it in their writings. It became important to the Lincoln biographers because Lincoln is supposed to have suggested Bissell for the governorship in 1856. Ida M. Tarbell, in her biography of Lincoln, quotes an Illinois historian as saying that this demonstrated the "sagacity" of Lincoln because of the good record of Bissell and because the latter had "refused to be brow-beaten by Jefferson Davis into the retraction of statements he had made on the floor of Congress."<sup>15</sup> Nicolay and Hay likewise repeated the whole story and added a little of their own:

At this point both parties might with great propriety have ended the correspondence. Sufficient inquiry had been met by generous explanation. But Davis, apparently determined to push Bissell to the wall, now sent his challenge. This time, however, he met his match in courage. Bissell named an officer of the army as his second, instructing him to suggest as weapons 'muskets, loaded with ball and buckshot.' The terms of the combat do not appear to have been formally proposed between the friends who met to arrange matters, but they were evidently understood; the affair was hushed up, with the simple addition to Bissell's first reply that he was willing to award the Mississippi regiment 'the credit due to their gallant and distinguished services in that battle.'<sup>16</sup>

The Illinois historians usually phrased their accounts to show that Bissell was not only right but also brave while Jefferson Davis was shown to be both cowardly and pig-headed. In 1907 one of these local historians described the affair in the following contemptuous manner:

A little later an Illinois colonel, who had commanded an Illinois regiment at Buena Vista, and then a member of Congress sat in his seat and listened to a Virginia member say the day had been won at Buena Vista by a certain Mississippi regiment. The Illinois Colonel resented that, and proved by the record that the Mississippi regiment was not within a mile and a half of the place where the fight occurred. The commander of the Mississippi

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 24, 1856, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ida M. Tarbell, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 2 vols., New York, 1900, I, 291.

<sup>16</sup> John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, 10 vols., New York, c. 1886, II, 26.

regiment challenged the Illinois member to fight a duel. He chose muskets, loaded to the muzzle, at forty paces, the participants to advance ten paces as long as there were two left. The Mississippian stated that was brutal. The Illinois colonel said fighting duels was brutal. Of course, a courageous Mississippian couldn't fight under those conditions so it was called off. The Mississippian was afterwards president of the southern confederacy and the Illinois colonel became Governor of Illinois.<sup>17</sup>

The versions which are kinder to Davis generally say that President Zachary Taylor, Davis's father-in-law, interfered to end the thing by pointing out that Bissell and Davis were alluding to a different time in the battle, much as Bissell's letter had admitted.<sup>18</sup> As far as can be determined Bissell said nothing of the incident although some of his friends may have had a hand in the building of the legend. Recently a letter was turned up in the Illinois State Historical Library which had been written by Davis to Dr. John Snyder, an Illinois physician who dabbled in local history. Apparently Snyder had been collecting information about Bissell and wrote to Davis concerning the incident. Shortly before his death, Davis wrote to Snyder as follows:

Bienvoir, Miss  
5th Nov 1885

J. F. Snyder, M. D.

Dear Sir

Yours of the 16th of Sept has been received & I regret that I am unable to furnish you with the correspondence between Col. Bissell & myself on the occasion to which you refer. When, at the organization of the Confederate govt. I was called to Montgomery Ala my correspondence, the accumulation of many years, was left in Mississippi and was when my library there was pillaged during the war. It has been reported that the papers were sent to the Army Hdqrs at Chicago. if so the correspondence may be found there otherwise it may be among the papers left by the late Col. Bissell. In default of these means of supplying the information you desire, I will give you my recollection of the affair. The issue arose from the speech of the Hon James A. Seddon Ho. of Representatives January 23d 1850 and the reply of the Hon Wm. H. Bissell Feb 21, 1850. The latter speech was reported to me as containing a derogatory reflection upon the 1st Miss. Regt which I commanded in Buena Vista. I thereupon addressed a note of inquiry to Col. Bissell to which he replied in a manner I deemed unsatisfactory and I then sent him by Col Saml W. Inge of the

<sup>17</sup> J. O. Humphrey, "Dr. John Mason Peck and Shurtleff College," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society* (no. 12, 1907), 148n. See also "The Four Constitutional Conventions of the State of Illinois," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* XI (July, 1918), 225.

<sup>18</sup> A. J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, 4 vols., Boston, c1928, III, 116; Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor*, New York, 1951, 299-300.

Ho. of Reps. an invitation to meet me outside the Dist of Columbia, and authorized my friend who handed him the invitation to arrange the necessary preliminaries for a hostile meeting. Col Bissell accepted the invitation but postponed any further arrangement until he had completed the revision of his Speech which was in the hands of the printer and genl James Shields of the Senate was designated as the friend to act for him. Some time elapsed and the proposed meeting became known wherefore warrants were issued & I had some difficulty in avoiding arrest. At length my friend was informed the meeting might occur the next day and that the second could have a conference in the evening to agree on the place, time, weapons &c. At that conference Genl. Shields the personal friend of both parties and a gallant man who was more willing to fight himself than to see his friend fight suggested that he thought the combat was wholly unnecessary, that Col Bissell had never meant to make any injurious reflection on my Regiment or on myself, to which my friend Col. Inge replied that the disavowal of such intention was all I had originally required & that if Col Bissell would write a note to that effect he thought it would be satisfactory. Quite late at night the note was brought to me and accepted thereby terminating the controversy.

Neither Col Bissell nor I desired to attract the notice of the public or to be recognized in the Character of Duellist, therefore the correspondence remained private, but as the existing warrants would have prevented attendance upon the two houses of which we were members it was necessary that notice should be given that the difficulty was at an end & the Second published a card formally announcing in the Stereotyped terms that the meeting had been amicably and honorably adjusted. Several years since a friend in Washington D. C. Sent to me the printed Slip containing the announcement but I have mislaid it & cannot even tell you in what paper it was published, but think it probable it was inserted in both the "Intelligencer" and the "Union" of that day.

Though in different parts of the field of Buena Vista Col Bissell and I had the bond of hard service and suffering in a common cause and I regret that others have not chosen to forget a subsequent disagreement or to bury it in the memory of the fraternal past as he and I did.

Very respectfully yours,

Jefferson Davis<sup>19</sup>

It seems likely that the account given by Davis is an accurate one. The dates and other details on which he can be checked are correct even though thirty-five years had elapsed since the events described. It seems probable that more correspondence was exchanged than was published and that a challenge was given. The version of Davis that the affair was smoothed over before the arrangements were made is a plausible one. If this assumption is

<sup>19</sup> Jefferson Davis to J. F. Snyder, M.D., Beauvoir, Miss., Nov. 5, 1885, in Illinois State Historical Library, Snyder Papers.

accepted, then the tales of muskets loaded with buckshot or ball at fifteen, or thirty, or forty paces must be pure fabrication. In any case it is obvious that no one backed down, and once analyzed, the speech of Bissell is inoffensive. The speech simply came at a time when men were on edge and quick to take offense. The story that the whole affair was a southern plot to destroy Bissell because of his slashing attack on the South can be dismissed as mere political maneuvering.

DONALD FRED TINGLEY

Eastern Illinois State College  
Charleston



## Orestes A. Brownson and the Irish

There is perhaps more than one blurred or perverted historical truth that must be set right before full justice is done the memory of Orestes A. Brownson. And among these is the charge that he was anti-Irish, which seems to have persisted to the very end of his life, and is still a pale ghost that stalks abroad stealthily here and there.<sup>1</sup> The question gains in interest when one remembers that the Irish were no inconsiderable influence in the Catholic Church already in Brownson's day and had quite a number of journals in the field through which they insisted on being heard. What was his real relation to them? Was he, the peerless American apologist, at loggerheads with them while fighting great battles for the Church which both he and they loved so much? There is no doubt that occasionally he crossed swords with their editors, their politicians, their priests and prelates, in honest skirmishes.<sup>2</sup> That some of the Irish considered him unfriendly or hostile to them, is equally true, and this impression was also shared and expressed at times by others. Still, this writer holds that he was in no sense inimical to them at any time, whatever the superficial appearances to the contrary due at times to the great excitement attendant upon the public discussion of very delicate national questions. Generally speaking, it can be said that while Brownson had on occasions criticisms as well as encomiums for the Irish, he seems to have leaned

<sup>1</sup> Even the three volume biography of Brownson by his son, Henry, though admirably objective on a large scale, does not convey an entirely correct impression regarding Brownson's general attitude to the Irish people, which was much more favorable than presented. Henry F. Brownson, *Brownson's Early, Middle, & Latter Life*, publisher, Detroit, Michigan, 1898, 1899, 1900. Brownson's biography by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., quotes only one-sidedly some of Brownson's animadversions on the Irish; *Orestes A. Brownson: A Pilgrim's Progress*, Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1939. Theodore Maynard's biography is little better in this respect; *Orestes Brownson, Yankee, Radical, Catholic*, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1943. Doran Whalen, *Granite for God's House*, Sheed & Ward, New York, 1943, skirts the question altogether.

<sup>2</sup> In his Valedictory in October, 1875, Brownson said, "That there has been more or less of antagonism between the *Review* and a portion of the Irish Catholic press published in this country, it were idle to attempt to deny;... but no antagonism of this sort has any thing to do with the discontinuance of the *Review*. The warmest and most esteemed friends of its editor, and its firmest and most generous supporters, have been among Catholics of Irish birth and Irish descent, as is the great body of our English-speaking Catholics." *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson*, Collected and Arranged by Henry F. Brownson, Detroit, Michigan, 1887, 20 Volumes, Vol. 20, 437, hereinafter referred to as *Works*.



more toward them as a people during the latter part of his life and was rather pro-Irish than anti-Irish.

The charge that he was anti-Irish originally grew out of Brownson's herculean efforts to head off and put down the anti-Catholic movement of the so-called Native American party of the early 50s, called in the second instance the Know-nothing party, one of the most virulently anti-Catholic parties that ever threatened to disturb the peace of the Church in the history of the country. The party was ostensibly against foreigners, but really at bottom decidedly against Catholic foreigners, and chiefly Irish Catholics, who during the previous decades had been the preponderant class of immigrants from abroad.<sup>3</sup> However, as Brownson pointed out, it was somewhat by accident that the Native American party became anti-Catholic, for there had been in the country from earliest times a Native American party in contradistinction to the foreigner, and the first paper started as a special organ of the party had been conducted by Catholics themselves, descended on the one side at least from an old American Catholic family.<sup>4</sup> Underlying the Native American party, therefore, was a certain native American feeling, a spirit or sentiment of nationality, proper to every people, shared in to some extent by all natives, and if the party had in time assumed a decidedly anti-Catholic character, it was due, Brownson maintained, to the craft and influence of no-popery leaders, political demagogues, wild radicals from the continent of Europe, and also to some extent to the imprudences of the foreign-born population of the country, naturalized or resident.

Brownson admitted that he himself had at first made the mistake of confounding the native American feeling of the party with the anti-Catholic feeling,<sup>5</sup> but in his elaborate discussions of the matter, he soon got his bearings, separated the two sentiments in the party—the native American from the anti-Catholic feeling—and adopted the plan of waging an all-out war against the anti-Catholic sentiment as distinctly anti-American in its nature, utterly opposed to

<sup>3</sup> Coleman J. Barry, O.S.B., who made a close study of the immigrant Catholic racial groups of the last century, says: "Between 1830-1870 Irish immigrants had come in the largest numbers, up to 50 per cent above the German totals. But by 1865 the German had equalled the Irish influx and, from 1870-1890, the Germans led the field until Italian immigration began in earnest in the last decade of the century and thence continued as the dominant immigrant movement in the Church of the United States for many years." *The Catholic Church and German Americans*, Coleman J. Barry, O.S.B., The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1952.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, Vol. 18, 286.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

the acknowledged principle of religious freedom as embodied in the American Constitution by the Founding Fathers. With this platform from which to launch the counter-attack, Brownson tried to bring home to his fellow Catholics in the country that any show of hostility on their part to the Native American party as such, without making the aforesaid distinction, would only throw around the whole body of Catholics in the country, native and foreign-born, the appearance of a foreign colony, carrying with it the unfortunate implication that their religion itself was foreign in nature, and therefore incompatible with American institutions. These very appearances their enemies were trying industriously and nefariously to create and maintain. To meet the real situation, then, Brownson counselled that, while waging war on the anti-Catholic sentiment of the party on the grounds of religious freedom, nothing could be wiser for Catholics than to show a becoming regard for the native American sentiment wrapt up in the movement, and to refrain scrupulously from any thing that might justly give offense to that sentiment. But with the bigotry and intolerance manifested toward foreigners, especially Irish Catholic foreigners, this was no easy matter to manage. The plan of attack, however, as laid down by Brownson was expertly sagacious and was the real level upon which the battle was eventually fought out and won, though Brownson himself was to encounter much misunderstanding and bitterness in trying to carry it through.

Pursuant to this strategy, therefore, Brownson proceeded to make it plain in the first part of an article he wrote on Native Americanism in 1854 that he stood ready to defend the sentiment of nationality in the party, and gave over the latter part of the article to a vigorous attack on the bigotry and intolerance of the party as anti-American.<sup>6</sup> However, in speaking in the tones of a natural-born American citizen he said a number of things that must have grated terribly upon the sensibilities of the foreign-born population of the country. He reminded them in strong terms that there was in the country such a thing as an American nationality, mainly of English origin and descent, and that it was to this self-same Anglo-American type of nationality that all foreigners were called upon to conform. He addressed himself to Irish Catholic foreigners in particular, and called in question, to say the least, their unyielding attachment to their national habits, customs and traditions. For them to attempt

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 281. Brownson had also previously published an article on Native Americanism in the January issue of his *Review*, 1845.

to keep up their own foreign nationalism on American soil would be both unwise and unavailing, he asserted, for it was to be counted a certainty that the distinctive American nationality that would claim the future would be determined by the Anglo-American population, and that this same Anglo-American population had the right to say to all foreigners: "It is for you to conform to us, and not for us to conform to you. We did not ask you to come here; we do not force you to remain. If you do not like us as we are, you may return whence you came."<sup>7</sup>

His general thought on this aspect of the question probably had the ring of asserting the superiority of the Anglo-American nationality or type of civilization over others. Worst of all, he attributed the growing radicalism of the country, flaming ominously here and there, to the great influx of foreigners into the land. The basic Anglo-American population of the country, he went on to say, had always been marked by a certain integrity and sobriety of conduct, while among the foreigners pouring into the country for so long, there had been many an anarchist or revolutionary demagogue who, having done his nefarious work abroad, had fled hither to bedevil the American scene with European politics, making "the merits of candidates depend on their views of O'Connell, Kossuth, Smith O'Brien, Kinkel, Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin, Louis Napoleon or Francis Joseph, Nicholas of Russia or the Sultan of Turkey." Did not these revolutionary demagogues so rig the last national elections that practically the whole country was at the mercy of those who controlled "the foreign vote?"<sup>8</sup>

Catholic foreigners reading the article thus far probably felt disgust and indignation. If they read to the end they would have seen that although Brownson had already said something against the Catholic Irish as aiders and abettors in a minor degree of the growing radicalism of the country, he was actually leading up gradually to a major indictment not of the Catholic, but of the non-Catholic immigrants. He named as the real fomenters of the Bedini riots in the principal cities of the land "German infidels and Italian patriots." Among the Irish it was mainly Protestant Irishmen from the North of Ireland that he indicted, who having caught their unholy inspiration from French Jacobinism, and being unable to fasten it on their own country, had fled hither in the early

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, Vol. 18, 284.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

days "to blast with its sirocco breath the rich promise of our young republic."<sup>9</sup> The real Catholic portion of the foreign population in the country he pronounced to be the most conservative body in the land, and declared that it was upon them that the country must rely for neutralizing the rising radicalism of the day. The only fault he found with Irish-Catholic foreigners on the score of radicalism was that they suffered themselves to be too easily influenced and guided, not by the sound principles of their religion, but by their demagogic or revolutionary countrymen. It was precisely non-Catholic or merely nominal Catholic foreigners, he said, who were the pets of revolutionary demagogues, and who were such a threat to the peace and order of the country. And while reasserting his stand on the side of the sentiment of American nationality, he utterly repudiated the Native American party, so called,

for its real leaders are foreigners, mostly apostate or renegade Catholics of the Padre Gavassi stamp. These vile European vagabonds have seized upon the honest Native American and republican sentiment of the country, and have sought to pervert it to a mere anti-popery sentiment. These men, the veritable chieftains of the present native American party, care not a straw for American interests, for genuine American sentiments, any further than they can use them for their own base and malignant purposes. It is really a foreign party, and therefore, as Americans as well as Catholics, we disavow it.<sup>10</sup>

In considering ways and means of defeating the Native American party, Brownson again gave offense—no doubt particularly to the Irish—in throwing out the suggestion whether it might not be wiser for Catholic immigrants to be willing to have the naturalization laws repealed and to forego the opportunity of citizenship if thereby they could debar from the rights of citizenship that radical class of immigrants who had come hither imbued with the infidel and anarchical principles of the mad European revolutionists, carrying on in the country their machinations against legitimate authority and social order in a language which very few of the citizens of the country understood. By willingly co-operating with the effort to deny the power of the ballot to this corrupt mass of non-Catholic foreigners who were doing their best to ruin the country, Brownson thought Catholic immigrants might be rendering an invaluable service to the land of their adoption.<sup>11</sup> It was only

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

a suggestion that he threw out, and he emphasized later that he had not advocated it.

When the article in which Brownson had expressed these views was published in the July issue of his *Review*, 1854, it created a tremendous uproar.<sup>12</sup> Irish and Catholic editors in the land rushed to reply to what they considered a broadside from a Yankee convert. First in the assault came J. F. MacMaster, the editor of the *Freeman Journal*, who traced his ancestry to North Ireland, and who evidently took offense at what he considered Brownson's aspersions on the radicals from North Ireland. His article was copied and published in the *Catholic Mirror* of Baltimore by its editor together with an abusive article by a correspondent who accused Brownson of venting his spleen on the Irish. This drew from Brownson a long letter of protest to the editor in which he deplored the impolicy of the *Mirror* in having denounced an American Catholic publicist for having expressed himself as a loyal American citizen—for that, said Brownson, is the way in which the whole non-Catholic public will look at the matter. An impudent fellow, he said, when I first became a Catholic, called me a traitor to my country, and I knocked him down for the insult. The standing charge against our religion is that it is anti-American, and what have you done, he asked, but confirmed that charge in the minds of the enemies of the Church? You have given them occasion to say: "It is as we said. Dr. Brownson has had the audacity to speak as an American citizen, and here are the Catholics out upon him in full cry." And he went on to intimate that he had had a motive in writing the article, and in saying what he did, that he had thought would be patent to every Catholic in the land, and thinking that he enjoyed the confidence of the Catholic public, he had cherished hopes of succeeding in what he had undertaken. But in this, he regretted to say, he had overrated the sagacity of his fellow-Catholics, and must in consequence pay for his mistake.

To the charge that he had vented his spleen on the Irish, that he was anti-Irish, he returned a flat denial. He had not flattered the Irish, it is true, but had addressed them as Catholics, and did not intend to be driven from that course in the future. "I have seen the warm susceptibilities of the Irish heart played upon by foreign and native demagogues," he said, "till my blood boiled with indignation; and I shall never for the sake of any base or selfish purposes,

<sup>12</sup> Schlesinger, *Orestes A. Brownson*, 215, says that "in July and August 9 Catholic Journals censured Brownson."



imitate those demagogues. Have I ever received any thing but benefits from the great body of the Irish in this country or elsewhere? Is it supposed that I am incapable of gratitude?"<sup>13</sup> Why, then, he was curious to know, should he be anti-Irish? Three years later when touching upon this matter he stated the case in a few lines that clearly imply the utter recklessness of the charges that had been preferred against him. "We had and have no interests and affections but such as are bound up with the Catholic body of which we are an insignificant member, and as the portion of that body from which we have the most to hope for Catholicity are Irish or of Irish descent, it is ridiculous to suppose that we were anti-Irish in our feelings, or were disposed to join the Know-nothings in a war against Irish Catholics, which could be only a war equally against ourselves."<sup>14</sup> When Brownson wrote this, the battle had been fought and won, the hurly-burly mostly over, but the last echoes had by no means yet died away.

To continue and finish the work he had begun with the publication of his article in July, 1854, Brownson also replied to the storm of criticism that arose from Catholics in three massive articles he subsequently wrote on Know-nothingism, the new name the old party now assumed.<sup>15</sup> In these three articles he defended his right against Americans, particularly against the Know-nothings, to be a Catholic, and his right against all gainsayers to speak as a loyal American citizen. Long years were to pass away before he was to admit with the manly candor which always marked him that he had after all made some mistakes in his gallant war on the bitterly anti-Catholic movement of that day. He had perhaps over-played his Americanism a bit, and he had called upon the Irish to Americanize. It is precisely these two things that had no doubt given such offense to the Irish.

<sup>13</sup> Brownson's *Middle Life*, 553 et seq.

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, Vol. 14, 574. It is interesting to note that Brownson's wife was of Irish descent, at least partly. June 19, 1827, he married Sally Healy, who had been one of his pupils when he taught school at Elbridge in Onondaga Co., New York. She was a cousin of the erst-while well-known John Healy, law partner of Daniel Webster, and one of the very best lawyers in Boston. Sally Healy was not a Catholic when Brownson married her, but was an earnest Christian in the best Protestant sense, and one of the greatest sorrows of her life was the unchristian character the writings of her husband assumed for a brief period in his early career. Brownson asserted that she had somewhat preceded him in her movement toward the Catholic Church. Cf. Brownson, *Early Life*, 480, also *Middle Life*, 468.

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, Vol. 18, 300-380.

In playing up his Americanism Brownson felt he had the noblest of motives. He saw clearly that the Know-nothings based all their hopes of success on claiming for themselves alone the real spirit of American nationality, and in charging Catholics with hostility to that sentiment. Nothing could be more important, then, than to bring out in the most crystal clear light that there was no incompatibility whatsoever between Catholicity and the honest sentiment of American nationality, that whatever of foreignism attached to Catholics in the country attached to them in their quality of foreigners, and not in their quality as Catholics, and was in no sense a part of their religion. He stressed that the Catholic religion is over and above all nationalities, and able to co-exist, without collision, with any. Brownson felt called upon to emphasize this inasmuch as large classes of his countrymen looked upon the Church as the *Irish* religion, and would regard becoming a Catholic in about the same light as becoming an Irishman. This was unfortunate since many of the Anglo-Americans were about as much prejudiced against the Irish as they were against the Church.<sup>16</sup> To meet this dual objection to the Church, Brownson, as an American convert to the Church, played up his Americanism to the hilt. The Irish sensed the over-play in the case, and took offense. Yet it all had a very important part in the general strategy Brownson had adopted. Years later, however, when he revived his defunct *Review* in 1873 he had come to take a slightly different view of matters. "Time was," he said, "when I paraded my Americanism, in order to repel the charge, that an American cannot be a convert to the Church without ceasing to feel and act as an American patriot, but I have lived long enough to snap my fingers at all charges of that sort. . . . Though my interest in my country and my countrymen is as great as ever, I do not consider it a high compliment to be credited with an intense Americanism."<sup>17</sup>

Brownson's preachments to the Irish that they must forget their

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>17</sup> *Works*, Vol. 20, 383. Yet there is no question that he always remained strongly American. Writing on Brownson in the June issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1896, George Parsons Lathrop, former editor, quoted an old friend of Brownson as saying that he "was as intense an American as Washington, Jackson, or Lincoln,"—an assertion that will strike any one as banal who has read his writings or studied his career. (p. 780). And it may be added that he was at the same time one of the acutest critics of things American that ever lived—all in the patriotic interest of improving his country and countrymen. "His observation on society," remarked Schlesinger, "has a profundity no other American of the time approached." *A Pilgrim's Progress*, 294.

distinctive Irish manners, customs, habits and usages and Americanize had an even greater irritating effect than playing up his Americanism. To some of the Irish, and especially to those who did not bother about following his thought closely, this must have seemed very much like calling upon the Irish to protestanize or apostatize. For to them the Catholic religion was part and parcel of their nationality, for which their fathers had lived and died, the one being almost indistinguishable from the other. Could they, then, really denationalize themselves without at the same time casting off Catholicity? Moreover when Brownson emphasized to them that the distinctive American nationality was substantially English, having derived its language, literature, laws, customs, social and political institutions from England, he was emphasizing that which must have been truly unpalatable in the case.<sup>18</sup> Was it, then, to this self-same Anglo-American nationality that they must now conform? Was it for this that as a nation they had endured long centuries of persecution and spoliation for "the faith once delivered to the saints" at the hand of this same Anglo-Saxon people who now boasted this self-same civilization? It is not surprising that the Irish insisted on having their say in the face of these offensive preachments from a Yankee convert, and they had little patience to make any nice distinctions. They ridiculed and sneered at the whole anti-Catholic movement of the day, calling it "nativism," and labelling it correctly "undemocratic and anti-republican." Passions flared on all sides. Yet Brownson seems at the time never to have wavered in his firm conviction that it was altogether the part of wisdom for the Irish to Americanize and submerge their distinctive nationality in the great swelling stream of American nationality.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Works*, Vol. 18, 316.

<sup>19</sup> It must be said, however, that Brownson from the first took large and broad views of this whole question. He saw clearly that since the Irish identified Catholicity so closely with their nationality, there existed for them a real difficulty to conceive it possible to denationalize themselves without at the same time casting off Catholicity. While castigating his own countrymen for having departed from the integrity and sobriety of their fathers, he called upon them to recognize that it was unreasonable for them to expect foreigners to be transformed at once into Americans; that nationality is a stubborn thing, and is not to be worn out in a day, or even in a single generation; that the nationality, the usages, manners, and customs, which are sometimes the immigrant's offense, are in themselves just as respectable as their own, and that much must be pardoned a poor people who for ages had been oppressed by tyrannical and incapable governments. "We may well complain of naturalized citizens," he said, "if they set at work deliberately to form such a party, or labor to keep alive their foreignism, or try to prevent the foreign from

However, by the time two decades had rolled away, Brownson had done a complete *volté-face* on this whole question. When in 1873 he wrote for the October issue of his *Review* his remarkable commentary on *Father Thébaud's Irish Race, Past and Present*, he frankly acknowledged that he had made a mistake in the past in calling upon the Irish to Americanize. What they must do now, he said, is to guard against Americanizing, for the moment they exchange their original Irish characteristics for those of the country, they lose the principal part of their power for good. What the Irish have done for religion in this country, Father Thébaud's book tells better than we can, he said, but their influence on American civilization, in preparing it for the reception of the Catholic faith, and the country for a true Catholic civilization, cannot yet be told, but it has been very great, especially in the New England states, where it has already almost abolished Puritanism. If it has not brought the descendants of the Puritans up to the Catholic standard, it has to a great extent brought them back to nature, the first step to be taken, since Puritanism is unnatural, against nature, not supernatural.

Were the Irish to adopt, however, the faith excepted, American modes of thought, manners, and customs, and become absorbed in the Anglo-American community, they would lose all their influence in softening the hardness, and in relaxing the rigidity of puritan manners, so hostile to real virtue, and the power of infusing into our life a freer, a more hospitable, genial, and cheerful tone and spirit. It would be doubtful, he thought, whether if completely Americanized and severed from their traditional relations, the Irish would retain even their faith beyond the second generation. So long therefore as the Irish retain their Irish characteristics and their invincible attachment to their religion and traditional civilization, they would be supplying the very elements the population of the country most needs.<sup>20</sup>

If there was any thing wanting in the peace-offering Brownson was now making the Irish, it was completed handsomely in the flattering comments he made in this same article on the Irish type

coalescing with the native population; but we must not blame them for what grows naturally out of their position, and what in itself is only creditable to their hearts." Cf. *Works*, Vol. 18, 298, 352.

<sup>20</sup> *Works*, Vol. 13, 562. In the October issue of his *Review*, 1874, 569, Brownson said point-blank: "Our Irish brethern were right in holding that to Americanize is to protestantize, and we were wrong in holding the contrary, at least at present."

of civilization. He looked upon the Irish as having been detached from the original parent stock before the patriarchal religion had to any extent become corrupt, or while they still retained the religion and the traditions of Noah in great force and comparative purity, and as having been directed by Providence to the Western Isle which they still inhabit, where, separated in some sort from the rest of the world, they preserved in comparative purity and vigor the primitive religion, and primitive civilization, institutions, manners, and customs, as transmitted to the human race from Noah and his sons. He remarked that he had heretofore regarded the Graeco-Roman type of civilization, as developed in our American Constitution, as the highest type of civilization the world has known since the great gentile apostasy, and had supposed that it only needed the Catholic faith and worship to be as perfect as any civilized order can be; but that Father Thébaud's book had given him a clew to Irish history which he had previously lacked, and had enabled him to perceive a higher as well as an older type, which he called the Irish type, and which is not only higher and older, but stronger and more persistent, through what he called the designs of providence in regard to the Irish people. And it is stronger and more persistent, he said, precisely because it preserves the primitive traditions of mankind, re-enforced by the Catholic faith, while all other civilizations have originated since the lapse of the nations into barbarism and idolatry, and are repugnant to, or at best a departure from, the normal order of society, or to the Christian order of society. The Irish order is based on truer, deeper, and more universal principles than the Anglo-Norman, the modern English, or the ancient Roman order.<sup>21</sup>

He regarded, therefore, the long hostility of the English and Irish not simply as a conflict of races, but rather of two orders of civilization or social organization. This explained to him why the antagonism of the Irish and the Anglo-Norman was practically just as great when both still professed the same religion as it has been since the English nation apostatized. To the Anglo-Normans, the Irish, representing the oldest civilization in the world, the Noachic type, were never civilized at all, but barbarians, savages of little more worth than wild beasts, whom the interests of civilization required to be exterminated; while to the Irish mind, the Anglo-Normans, civilized after the pattern of Nimrod, were robbers, ruf-

---

<sup>21</sup> *Works*, Vol. 13, 556.



fians, unmitigated savages, cruel, heartless, without any sense of justice or humanity, worthy descendants of the pirates of the North, veneered by a thin covering—derived through France—of Graeco-Roman or Italo-Greek civilization, itself of barbaric origin. The two civilizations were opposed one to the other almost as fire and water, and could by no possibility co-exist on the same territory in peace and harmony. The Normans first endeavored to bring the Irish under their type of civilization, but failing in that, they directed all their efforts for four hundred years to the degradation and extinction of the Irish race, but with what success history tells us when it states that the great Anglo-Norman lords settled in Ireland, adopted the manners and customs of the Irish, intermarried with them, and became more Irish than the Irish themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Now all this flattering commentary on the Irish and their type of civilization was made well-nigh twenty years after Brownson had published his article in 1854 in which he had given such dire offense to the Irish. So mighty indeed had been its reverberations that they echoed across the Atlantic with telling effect. J. H. Newman was just organizing at the time the teaching staff of the new Catholic University of Ireland which he had been chosen to head, and the first invitation he issued to be a member of the staff was to Brownson. The subject he suggested to Brownson was geography, to which Brownson demurred as it did not exactly suit him.<sup>23</sup> Shortly thereafter, Sir John Action was sojourning in England and heard from Newman's friends of the invitation extended to Brownson and of Brownson's refusal or hesitation. On crossing again to Munich, however, Acton learned from Brownson's son, Henry, who

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 584. Yet some Irish journalists were not satisfied with Brownson's encomiums. In reply Brownson said: "No man has more ably defended the Irish than we did in our review of *Father Thébaud's Irish Race, Past and Present*, for which more than one Irish journalist roundly abused us. Our warmest and most intimate friends are, and always have been with the Irish, but we sometimes feel it necessary to rebuke some Irish journalists who are perpetually obtruding their nationality upon us, and, in doing so, we do not remind them that it is they, not we, who are making national distinctions." Cf. Vol. 13, 584.

<sup>23</sup> Referring for evidence to a letter written by Newman to Wiseman, February 1st, 1854, Fergal McGrath asserts that the first invitation to by Lecturer Extraordinary was extended to Döllinger, then at the height of his fame as Prof. of Canon Law and Church History in the University of Munich, and member of the Frankfort Parliament. But McGrath admits that there is no record of Döllinger's grounds of refusal. Newman, to the contrary, asserts in his letter to Brownson: "You are the first person to whom I have applied." Cf. Fergal McGrath, S.J., *Newman's University, Idea and Reality*, Longman, Green and Company, 1950, 215. Also Brownson's *Middle Life*, 471.

was studying there, that Brownson would not refuse the invitation if the subject given him were more to his taste. Dating his letter, Munich, May 13, 1854, Acton wrote what is perhaps the most remarkable letter Brownson ever received, urging him in the most flattering and eloquent tones to come to Europe and accept the chair in the Catholic University of Ireland, remarking in the course of his letter: "your intercourse here will be as an infusion of new blood in many societies, in Dublin, in London, in Paris, and in other places."<sup>24</sup> In the interim, Brownson had accepted the invitation to be a Lecturer Extraordinary when Newman in a second letter suggested as his subject the philosophy of religion, and in preparation for going abroad, Brownson issued a recall to his son at Munich whom he wished to assist him in keeping his *Review* going while he was abroad, for the sentiment had been publicly expressed that the suspension of his *Review* would be nothing less than "a literary calamity" should he go abroad.

Then the thunderclap broke. Newman in great embarrassment wrote Brownson asking him to postpone for the time being his intended visit. This request he was just now forced to make, he explained, by representations "from quarters to which I cannot but listen, on the ground of some offense which happens to have been *just now taken*, in America, and, I believe, in Ireland, at something which you have lately written." Newman's letter was dated August 23, 1854, and Brownson's article on Native Americanism had appeared just the month before, in the July issue of his *Review*. The urbane Newman was all apologies and closed expressing his regrets that Brownson had already summoned his son from Europe apropos of his going abroad. The great howl of the Irish over that July article had rolled across the Atlantic and had to all effects cancelled Brownson's invitation.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Middle Life*, 474.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 481. An unknown correspondent (the name has become illegible), but evidently a person of authority, writing from Baltimore, August 4, 1854, to Dr. Taylor of the Catholic University of Ireland, said that Brownson's July Article on Native Americanism had "evoked a perfect tempest of odium and indignation against him." *Newman's University, Idea and Reality*, 218, n. Fergal McGrath is hardly fair to Brownson when he says that, "Though an able and sincere man, he had picked quarrels with almost every one in America." (p. 216). Brownson had a work to do, and in going about it, it was inevitable but that he was to tread on the corns of some worthies. By the time he was trying to put down the hostility to Catholics of Know-nothingism, he had just suspended his great battle for a recognition of the papal powers as the only possible answer to modern political atheism—a battle that had stirred up a furious storm among Catholics, or rather from Catholics. Yet twenty years later

In replying to Newman, Brownson said that the postponement itself of the proposed visit was only what he himself wanted and should have been necessitated to request as he needed at least a year to make arrangements for going abroad and to prepare his son to take charge of his *Review* during his absence. He expressed his entire readiness to make the visit later "should the present storm blow over." His own conviction, however, was that the interests of all parties concerned would be best consulted, especially those of Newman himself and the university, if it were plainly understood that he was not to be connected with the university in any manner. The *Irish* party, both here and abroad, he said, will never accept me. His presence there would only be looked upon as more evidence that an attempt was being made to Anglo-Saxonize the Irish. "The storm that recently broke out here, is only the expression of long pent-up feelings." He wished, therefore, if the thing could be honestly done, to make a final declension in the matter. Yet Newman, with his noble dreams of a great university, was quite unwilling to allow Brownson to decline with finality, and still clung to the hope that the storm would blow over, and, in such an eventuality, he would be very sorry to have already committed himself in the matter. The professorship offered you, he assured Brownson, will be kept open for you, at least until we see what turn events will take.<sup>26</sup> But the shores of Ireland Brownson was destined never to see, nor any other foreign shores.

Again, when Brownson published an article in the October issue of his *Review*, 1861, on *The Reading and Study of the Scriptures*, he made a comment on the influence of the Celtic genius on the English language which scarcely could have been palatable to the Irish.<sup>27</sup> Entering into the question then agitated about a new and better translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular, he expressed the opinion that no new translation could ever equal the rare literary merits of the Protestant King James version. Not even could this be achieved by enlisting the great stylistic talents of John Henry Newman, although something might be accomplished on that score by taking the King James version "as a basis [for English], correcting it according to the readings of the Vulgate, and avoiding

came the solemn definitions of the Vatican Council as eloquent evidence of how right Brownson had been in calling for a recognition and practical acceptance of those powers.

<sup>26</sup> *Middle Life*, 479 et seq.

<sup>27</sup> *Works*, Vol. 20, 171.

its mistranslations and its few grammatical and literary errors."<sup>28</sup> The literary superiority inherent in the King James version is due, he said, to the fact that that translation was made in the sixteenth century when the English language had reached its zenith, and was marked by a majestic simplicity, a naturalness, an ease, grace, and vigor which it has been gradually losing since, and which, if not wholly lost, is owing to the influence of that translation together with the Book of Common Prayer. Every day has the language been departing more and more from the grandeur, strength, and simplicity that distinguished it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a proof in itself that the reading of the Scriptures, at least in the King James version, has grown less and less common, or that the authors who have gained the mastery in the modern literary world, have not modelled their literary tastes after its study. Say what we will, continued Brownson, "since the time of Burke, the Celtic genius, aided by French influence, has been triumphing over the old Anglo-Saxon, and pompousness of diction and diffuseness of style, have taken the place of terseness and simplicity."<sup>29</sup> For this aspersion on the Celtic genius he was to be rapped severely over the knuckles in the *Dublin Review* three years later by an anonymous writer, supposedly William George Ward, the editor at the time, who remarked that Brownson's antipathy to the Irish race is well known, and breaks out here and there in his *Review*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Newman actually did undertake a new translation into the vernacular. In August, 1857, Cardinal Wiseman formally notified him of the recommendation made at the Synod of Oscott in 1855 that he undertake the work, and he set about it at once. He was hugely flattered by the honor thus conferred upon him. But after his list of translators had already begun work, and he himself had made quite an outlay of money ("considerable to me"), complications set in. Word came that Archbishop Kenrick of Baltimore was also engaged on a new English version, and had already published part of it. The suggestion of a current Synod of Baltimore that the two, Archbishop Kenrick and Newman, combine their efforts for one common version instead of two, came to naught, and Newman saw another of his undertakings sink into the black waters of defeat. He tried to console himself partly with the idea that his version would anyhow have been made "a great hash of" by the Propaganda, the Committee of Revision, and ordinary revision, etc. Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, Vol. I, 418-428.

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, Vol. 20, 183.

<sup>30</sup> *Theological Errors of the Day—Brownson's Review, Dublin Review*, LIV, January, 1864, 93. The anonymous author of the article appended a very interesting footnote on this matter when he wrote: "Dr. Brownson, on more than one occasion, charges Irish writers (Edmund Burke especially) with having corrupted the old Saxon vigor and simplicity of the English language. We believe that he could name no eminent Irish writer whose style has less of the Saxon or Anglo-Saxon in it than that of Milton, and the contemporary of Milton, Dr. Johnson: and that he could name no English writer in which it is more conspicuous than Swift and



In 1860 some of the Irish may have felt that an old score was squared with Brownson when Father John Boyce, a priest from Maynooth seminary, Ireland, and at that time pastor of the only Catholic Church in Worcester, published a novel under the title of *Mary Lee*, or *The Yankee in Ireland*.<sup>31</sup> In the work as originally published in the *Metropolitan* magazine, Brownson was satirized in the person of Dr. Horseman, one of the main characters in the novel. He was castigated for his indiscreet zeal as a convert, especially for his interpretation of the doctrine that there is no salvation out of the Church, and the author, as Brownson saw it, "warned his countrymen [the Irish] against one whom he regards as their enemy." It is true that the author did not mention Brownson by name, but there could be no doubt in the public mind who was meant, for besides certain humorous resemblances between Brownson and Dr. Horseman, Dr. Horseman was given as the portrait of a Yankee Catholic Reviewer, and, as Brownson pointed out, there was only one such in the world—himself. Michael Earls, S.J., explained in the *Commonweal* that it was really Bishop Fitzpatrick of Boston who prevailed upon Father Boyce to tone down the severities attaching to the Dr. Horseman character, and when the novel came out in book form, Dr. Horseman had been changed into the banal Dr. Henshaw.<sup>32</sup> While acknowledging the implied apology, Brownson did not like this, saying that the change had marred the artistic merit of the book. He assured Father Boyce that he had never been offended by the personalities indulged in in his regard, and that he himself loved a joke as much as any of his Irish friends. "So here is our hand, Father John," he said, "only give us back our friend Dr. Horseman, and remember for the future that Jonathan can bear with good humor a joke, even at his own expense, if it lack not the seasoning of genuine wit."

Although Brownson always aimed at being just to the Irish people, and at times perhaps even more than just, a letter he wrote to Father Hecker in 1869 would seem to mark a turning point in his general attitude and estimation of the Irish. In that letter he remarked: "I think I am turning Paddy. . . I am very Irish, when I

Goldsmith. Among the writers who have taken their place as classics in our literature decidedly the most un-English are the Scotch Hume, Robertson, Sir James Macintosh, etc., the latter especially in his history of England."

<sup>31</sup> *Works*, Vol. 20, 83, 90. Fr. J. Boyce and Brownson had always been fairly good friends, and often met at Holy Cross College, Worcester, where Brownson's four sons went to college, or at Brownson's home.

<sup>32</sup> May 11, 1934,



do not listen to their defenses for themselves. They are remarkable people, the mainstay under God of the Church with us."<sup>33</sup> This was written five years before his review of *Father Thébaut's Irish Race, Past and Present*, certainly one of the most laudatory and profound treatises on the Irish way of life or civilization ever written.

When one recalls some of the things that Brownson said in his 1854 article on Native Americanism, and the anti-Irish impression he must have made thereby at the time, it is not wholly surprising that some set him down as unfriendly, to say the least, to the Irish—that is, if the article was to be taken alone. Apart from matters already touched upon in this general survey, this writer thinks that one of his pen-pictures of the Irish in the 1854 article was definitely unjust and truly offensive—but no doubt unintentionally.<sup>34</sup> And that the impression stuck that he was unfriendly to the Irish, especially with those who read his Review only irregularly, is just as little surprising. When time allowed passions to cool and temporary excitement to abate, the over-all picture reveals to us in Brownson a man loftily above all national prejudices or unfriendly distinctions. He was no more anti-Irish than he was anti-Jesuit—a charge that was also made against him—though he had on occasions criticisms as well as eulogies for both. The whole question of Brownson's relation to the Irish is so justly and so well stated by a reviewer of *Brownson's Middle Life* in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1900 that it is worthy of quotation here as a summation of the matter.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the book to Irish readers, though certainly not the most pleasant, will be the tone of lofty patronage with which the author of the work (Henry Brownson) is pleased to speak of Irish Catholics in America. This tone is also noticeable in the letters of many of Brownson's friends, who speak of themselves as native Americans, and of the Irish as foreigners or immigrants. The letters of Father Hecker quoted in this volume are by no means exempt from this same blemish. Brownson, the elder, was far superior to any of these men. He had, like Cardinal Manning, a genuine love for the Irish people, and whilst he sometimes reminded them of their defects, he never minimized their good qualities, or spared the self-sufficiency of their critics.<sup>35</sup>

THOMAS R. RYAN, C.P.P.S.

Vincentian Academy, Pittsburgh

<sup>33</sup> Paulist Archives.

<sup>34</sup> *Works*, Vol. 18, 299.

<sup>35</sup> *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol. VII, 1900, 476.

## Use of the Local Press in Historical Research

Although historians have traditionally adopted a cautious view regarding the significance of the newspaper in historical research, many still favor its use. Parker, for example, is particularly concerned about public opinion and implies that the newspaper is an excellent source of information for local history.<sup>1</sup> Implicit in other writings are the following: (1) newspapers reveal the interests and ideas present in a given period of time, (2) newspapers are indicators and interpreters of the life and spirit of the time or locality, (3) newspapers serve as an index of changing social conditions as revealed in the announcements of engagements, marriages, birth, and death,<sup>2</sup> (4) newspapers may be used to reconstruct the history of the small community because it is simple and uncomplicated.<sup>3</sup>

This paper is designed to examine the validity of the above mentioned statements in light of our empirical experience with a weekly newspaper used in the construction of a community history.

The study in question is an analysis of a one-industry coal mining community which is typical of an area with respect to economic base, the ethnic origins of settlements, and emergent social structure. It is a study in the rise of social organization and subsequent developments of such organization including the following:

- a. The institutional patterns of economics, law, government, religion, family, education, and recreation.
- b. The manifest value orientations and structures implicit in the institutional framework listed above.
- c. The resultant personality configurations.

---

Author's Note. The authors are indebted to Professors Harold Briggs, Norman Caldwell and William Pitkin, Department of History, Southern Illinois University, for their valuable comments in the construction of this manuscript. The study was financed by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and The Graduate School, Southern Illinois University.

<sup>1</sup> Donald D. Parker, *Local History, How to Gather It, Write, and Publish It*, New York, Social Science Research Council, 1944, Chapter III.

<sup>2</sup> Lucy M. Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1923, 36. Still considered an authoritative work in this area.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

The community, which for purposes of this paper shall be named Coal Town, is situated in the heart of the mid-western bituminous coal fields.<sup>4</sup> It is in the southern part of the state, and in the southeastern section of the county.

## Selection of Community

The community was selected for study and analysis because it possessed the following requirements:

1. It is a community that has gone through a period of rapid expansion, prosperity, and decline and has, during its history, experienced social and economic changes typical of coal mining communities in the region.
2. The community of Coal Town is of recent origin (incorporation date 1914). Thus its social history and subsequent analysis could be constructed with a high degree of accuracy. Further source materials in the form of newspaper documents, census figures, births, deaths, marriages, and divorces were readily available for examination.
3. The total population is sufficiently small (population 2300) so that the community could be studied intensively. Further, members of many of the families who lived through the rise and decline of the community were living and available for interview.

The nature and purpose of the present study involved methodological and field techniques derived from the disciplines of history, sociology, social psychology, psychology and anthropology. In addition to any specific set of techniques employed, our data were examined in light of the frames of reference characteristic of each of the above social sciences. For example, as we proceeded in our research, we kept asking ourselves how persons in each of the above social sciences would approach, analyze, interpret and assess our data. We soon discovered that such an approach, at times bewildering and confusing, presented us with an integrated, holistic view of social life in Coal Town. By the same token each method and frame of reference isolated from the other would have given us at best a compartmentalized understanding of what happened to the people of Coal Town and their way of life.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Identity of the community and its newspaper has been disguised because of unfavorable publicity which might emerge from disclosure of information derived in interviews.

<sup>5</sup> Julian H. Steward, *Area Research: Theory and Practice*, Social Science Research Council, Bulletin 63, 1950.

## Newspaper Analysis

Community analysis which involves a time sequence must rely on whatever historical accounts are available for examination. The writers in this instance were particularly fortunate in securing from the surviving editor a copy of almost every *Coal Town Weekly* from 1919 to the end of publication in 1953. *Coal Town Weekly* was, with the exception of one three-year period, the only newspaper published in the community. Two other newspapers started, but failed within a two-year period. Newspapers were systematically analyzed and abstracted by initially inspecting the contents, then a schedule was set up to abstract the contents. We recorded our findings on IBM cards and these were analyzed and evaluated.<sup>6</sup> Items abstracted included the following: violent deaths, fighting and disorderly conduct, prostitution, theft and robbery, rape, corruption, fraud, marriage announcements, divorces, news coverage and type of news coverage outside Coal Town, hospitalization for mental illness, suicide, church news, reform movements, expressions of community faith, economic conditions, management-labor disputes, union conflicts, advertisements, announcements of social activities, number of articles concerned with ethnic people, outside entertainment, evidences of community development.

### *Commentary on Coal Town Weekly as a Source of Data.*

*Coal Town Weekly* was sensitive to selected segments of life in the community. It described:

1. Social events, celebrations
2. Criminal activity, fraud, corruption
3. Bootlegging
4. Current fads in clothing, buying, selling
5. Church activities and services
6. Social clubs
7. Economic difficulties
8. Union activities
9. Politics
10. Marriages, divorces, births, deaths

Nevertheless, *Coal Town Weekly* was completely unreliable as a record of the extent of any of the above activities. Thus it afforded us a limited, superficial view of life in the community. As we

---

<sup>6</sup> Copy of schedule utilized may be obtained by writing the authors.

proceeded in our analysis we became increasingly convinced that the newspaper was never able to penetrate the basic fabric of community life, the feelings and the struggles of the people. It operated always at the periphery of social life and possessed no systematic procedure for the gathering of news items. Whether this is usually the case with a small town weekly or whether this was unique to Coal Town we cannot say with certainty. Nevertheless it raised many questions for us with respect to the usefulness of the newspaper as a research tool. The validity of newspaper reporting was determined by a comparison of these findings with the findings of *official records* and *intensive personal interviews*. The writers interviewed 250 residents and spent a total of 2,000 hours collecting such data, from which the following table has been drawn.

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN EVENTS REPORTED IN NEWSPAPER AND EVENTS RECORDED IN PUBLIC FILES 1919-1953

	Events reported in newspaper 1919-1953	Events reported from official records 1919-1953	Percentage Difference
1. Fighting and Disorderly Conduct	156	361	56.78
2. Prostitution	0	82	100.00
3. Rape	5	21	76.19
4. Corruption	89	138	35.50
5. Fraud	32	65	50.76
6. Marriages	1,053	1,131	6.88
7. Divorces	4	130	96.92
8. Hospitalization for Mental Illness	3	147	97.95
9. Naturalization and Name Change	0	59	100.00

An analysis of Table I reveals that, in comparisons between events reported in newspapers and those found in official records, significant discrepancies exist in all items but one (Marriages). It is our belief that the actual discrepancies for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 are far greater than our statistics reveal. For example, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the orderly processes of government and the collection as well as maintenance of public records were not of immediate concern or interest to the citizens of Coal Town. Characteristic of the entire area was the tendency for records to become subject to the personal and political whims of those in control. Such indifference to records, most apparent in statistics dealing with crime, were present in regard to other data considered socially unacceptable.



For considerable periods of time arrests were conducted in a haphazard fashion. At one stage in the history of Coal Town it was necessary for court costs to be paid before an arrest could be made. This condition was dictated by the behavior of citizens who were reluctant to follow through a complaint and by officials who were somewhat ambivalent about law enforcement. One informant had this to say by way of explanation:

This notion about plunking down court costs, I think, can be explained very easily. It was a policy merely because neighbors would become angry with each other and would call up the police and say 'Come and arrest my neighbor because he is bothering me.' The police would come up and charge the neighbor and then you had in the meantime lost interest or had ducked out or ran away and you wouldn't prefer any charges against your neighbor so that left the police holding the bag. They finally had to be sure that you were serious about bringing charges against someone before they would act. In other words, you had to put down the money and this indicated that you were serious enough about bringing charges.

With respect to *Coal Town Weekly*, we acquired the following information which gave us some perspective on the nature and character of the news. The newspaper never possessed a secure economic base. Its circulation was limited and tenuous. Presentation of issues or taking sides on issues could mean a drop in circulation. As one resident of Coal Town stated:

See, if you get too many people mad at you in this small community, they won't take your paper, and when they won't take your paper, you can't make a living.

Physical reprisal for the expression of differences of opinion was a frequent occurrence and that intimidated many citizens of Coal Town, including its newspaper editor. All of this meant that many significant items of news were consciously or inadvertently omitted. Much of the space was devoted to "filler columns," sometimes called "canned news." A good deal of the daily news about occurrences in the community and surrounding areas was derived from newspapers outside the community. Much of the news was obviously biased to picture the community as being better than it was and to remove responsibility from local citizens for community difficulties. Perhaps the most fantastic illustration of the former was an effort to picture Coal Town as a health resort for ill people. This when the physical environment was hot and humid, water and sewerage of questionable health standards, and the social

climate repleted with hostility and violence. The following excerpt was taken from *Coal Town Weekly*, Friday, September 22, 1922:

## A Health Resort

Few people realize that this city is making a record as a health resort that is equalled by few cities of its size. According to the reports reaching the *Coal Town Weekly* there has been only two deaths in this city within the past eighty days. One of these Saturday night was caused by a shooting following the love of two men for one woman, leaving only one death from sickness and this an infant. There are few cities of over 5,000 population that can boast of a record of this kind.

The city being new in its growth is mostly made up of people of middle age or under who have come here to live within the past four years. It has the flower of manhood and womanhood in this part of the state.

The city administration assisted by *Coal Town Weekly* organized the annual cleanup day which has met with hearty co-operation on the part of the public. Rubbish and tin cans have been removed from the city. The breeding places of flies and filth have been destroyed and causes for disease have been removed. While the city needs considerable more cleaning up, the condition is much better than it was a short time ago.

Another movement to lower the death rate of the city was when the mayor, the City Council and legal department of the city put a ban on the carrying of guns within the city. The arrests became so frequent and the fines so heavy that the carrying of a gun became unpopular. No more pernicious firing of guns and killings as the result of minor quarrels have occurred for months. While there have been three shootings one of which was fatal within the past three months neither of these was caused by drunken brawls, and death from this cause has emphatically been eliminated.

An examination of records suggested that the statistics regarding death were completely unreliable and that efforts to remove unsanitary conditions were exaggerated.

## Implications

Needless to say we found *Coal Town Weekly* grossly deficient in any of the qualities suggested by either Parker or Salmon previously mentioned, and we take a dim view of attempting to write a history with newspapers of this type. We had no confidence that *Coal Town Weekly* was sensitive to the interests and ideas of the people, and any attempt to employ the newspaper as an interpreter of life and spirit would only result in distortions and misrepresentations.

The assertion by some historians that the small community is simple and knows itself well must be viewed with great caution. Both anthropologists and sociologists shy away from terms like "primitive or simple people" because of the deceptive connotations which such terms imply. Our own culture dealing with small communities reveal complex systems of social organization and differentiation.<sup>7</sup>

Finally the notion that the *newspaper* is a valid index of life in a *community*, is based on the assumption that the persons who reside there know what is *true* about the *community*. The evidence from our study does not support such an assumption. Instead we learned that *unreal* ideas about others, suspicion of *persons, neighbors, friends*, and distortions of community occurrences were pronounced and still persist. Thus the local newspaper in its presentation of news may perpetuate many ideas which are in fact distortions. Correction of such stereotypes does not occur, because they are perpetuated by the many. In this connection we might ask if our experiences in the utilization of *Coal Town Weekly* have been unique or typical of what the social scientist may expect in dealing with other local newspapers in general. It is our impression that the essential inadequacy of the local newspaper as a historical source at *any level*, be it accuracy, spirit of the time, or ethos, is far more typical than many are willing to recognize.

HERMAN R. LANTZ  
J. S. McCrARY

Southern Illinois University

<sup>7</sup> See especially W. L. Warner and associates, *Democracy in Jonesville*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1949, and Carl Withers, *Plainville, U.S.A.*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1945.

## "Era of Good Feelings" Reconsidered

James Monroe's administration has long borne the epithet "the era of good feelings." The phrase has faithfully appeared in scores of books dealing with the Monroe era. For want of a better definition historians have clung to the antique verbalism long after it lost its meaning. A re-examination of the origin and meaning of the term in other than its political aspects suggests new reasons for retaining "the era of good feelings" in the idiom of United States history.

In the spring of 1817, the man who had terrorized Europe was brooding in his island exile at St. Helena, the Treaty of Ghent had restored peaceful relations between Great Britain and the United States, and the sharp domestic bickerings climaxing in veiled threats of secession had given way to the election of James Monroe. The first months of Monroe's administration were honeymoon months in which partisan struggles noticeably subsided. In part this was the work of the bland and courteous Monroe who sought to conciliate political opposition in New England. In 1816 Massachusetts and Connecticut had withheld their electoral votes from Monroe, but his inaugural speech pleased Federalists, and his appointment of John Q. Adams to the Department of State delighted many. A few weeks later Monroe announced that he would tour the eastern states. His presidential visit to New England was the first since Washington's.

The chief executive's tour was manna for the newspapers. Ever since the termination of wars in Europe and America and the easing of the extraordinarily bitter political tensions prior to and during the War of 1812 American journals had found little news of high excitement value. News stories about the Hessian fly, assorted murders and hangings, a ubiquitous sea serpent, and the routine affairs of Congress did not equal the wartime drama in which the British invasion and burning of the capitol, the battles of Lake Erie, Lake Champlain, and New Orleans, and the defeat of Napoleon, and a plethora of historic events played across the pages of every newspaper. With the end of the war newspaper readers found peace tedious and politics infantile. On the eve of Monroe's tour the *Federal Republican* and *Baltimore Telegraph* took note of "the dull and drawling complaint against public papers." It wailed that its readers, "so

long accustomed either to the reports of wars from abroad, or of political discussions at home," blamed the newspapers for the deficiency of exciting news. The editors admonished the complainers to prize the calm as God's gift to a weary, battle-worn world. "The sterility of the newspapers is complained of . . . by those whose appetite is to be gratified only by rumors of monarchs deposed, of empires lost and won, or by details of horrid pomp and splendid miseries of war," asserted the *National Intelligencer*. It conceded that there was a "diminished interest" in newspapers "since the termination of the European war." The *Intelligencer* suggested that local papers remedy the situation by printing congressional debates and speeches. In Boston a religious journal loftily commented that "one newspaper after another comes to hand, is seized with accustomed eagerness, and perused with a panting desire to find something new and wonderful from some quarter of the political world. But disappointment ensues—the paper is laid aside in languid silence." A few editors used fraudulent stories, such as the report that Napoleon had escaped from St. Helena, to color otherwise drab copy.<sup>1</sup>

For days prior to Monroe's departure from Washington newspapers in each community through which he was to pass announced plans for the celebrations and receptions in his honor. At first the president had indicated that his tour was merely a routine inspection of defenses, but it quickly transformed itself into a protracted promenade of triumph. Each town and village through which the president's party passed showered the entourage with all the glitter and gaiety it could summon. Governors and other high officials handed the president across state lines where more receptions and parades awaited him. As Monroe made his way to New England newspapers all over the country followed his "progress" and reprinted detailed descriptions of public dinners, official welcomes, and all ceremonies held in his honor. In New England the citizens were determined to match the displays of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Monroe arrived in Boston in time to celebrate the Fourth of July. The city outdid itself in its welcome. Speeches, dinners, inspection tours, parades, and fireworks greeted the president. At nearby Cambridge the ceremonies were appropriately august. Young Caleb Cushing delivered an oration in Latin, and Harvard College

<sup>1</sup> *Federal Republican and Baltimore Telegraph*, n.d., quoted by Poulson's *American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), April 25, 1817; *National Intelligencer*, March 29, 1817; *Boston Recorder*, May 13, 1817.



duly solemnized the friendly atmosphere by conferring an honorary degree on the chief executive.

The Boston *Columbian Centinel*, a vigorous Federalist organ, gave minute coverage to the president's visit. It coined the term "era of good feelings" in connection with the holiday. The *Centinel* noted that party antagonism had greatly abated during the presidential visit to New England, and longtime political foemen actually gathered in pleasant conversation at former President Adams' festive table at which Monroe was the honored guest. "ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS" appeared as the title line of the paragraph. In Baltimore *Niles' Weekly Register* reprinted the *Centinel's* felicitous remarks along with those from various New England papers that euphorically traced Monroe's tour.<sup>2</sup>

Caught in the buoyant mood of the moment the *Centinel* had not intended to create an epithet for the whole of Monroe's administration. In 1817 the Boston *Centinel* had a penchant for coining extravagant, attention-getting title lines whether for murders or politics. It also had an inclination to use "era" freely. In February, 1817, the newspaper's Washington correspondent called certain political developments "the era of the triumph of New England policy." Less than two months after the *Centinel* had termed Monroe's visit to Boston "the era of good feelings," the same newspaper printed stories headed "Age of Fabricated Reports" and "Season of Bad Feelings," the first dealing with a British hoax and the second with a half dozen murders. "Era," "age," and "season" had cheap usage in the *Centinel's* composing room. The newspaper

<sup>2</sup> Boston *Columbian Centinel*, July 12, 1817; *Niles' Weekly Register*, XII (July 19, 1817), 329. The full text of the *Centinel's* paragraph reads:

"ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS"

"During the late Presidential Jubilee many persons have met at festive boards, in pleasant converse, whom party politics had long severed. We recur with pleasure to all the circumstances which attended the demonstrations of good feelings.

"The dinner given by the venerable Ex-President ADAMS, consisted of nearly forty covers—was arranged with noble simplicity, and unaffected elegance, and embraced as guests eminent men of all political parties. The accomplished and excellent Lady of the Ex-President did the honors, seated between the President of the U. States and the Governor of the Commonwealth. Besides these Personages, and their respective suites, there were among the guests His Honor Lt. Gov. Phillips; Chief Justice Parker; Judges Davis and Adams; Marshall Prince and Mr. Blake, District Attorney; the Commodores Bainbridge, Hull and Perry; Hon. William Gray, H. G. Otis, James Lloyd, and Josiah Quincy; W. N. Boylston, Esq.; President Kirkland; Rev. Messrs. Whitney and Coleman; Mr. SHAW, to whom the Republic of letters is greatly indebted for the establishment of the Athenaeum, and others whose names we could not learn."

did not use "era" in the sense of an historical epoch but in the sense of a fad or passing mood. As for the spirit of "good feelings," the newspaper acknowledged its early demise. On September 13, 1817, the editor feelingly complained that, following New England's cordial reception of President Monroe, the Federalists had become all the more "objects of violent but senseless abuse and recrimination" among Republicans. He wondered at the cause of "this fresh issue of gall and bitterness. . . ." Politics and hard feelings had resumed. Six years later *Niles' Weekly* mused that, for better or worse, the *Centinel's* epithet of the moment had clung to the whole of Monroe's administration.<sup>3</sup>

Within a generation the phrase found its way into textbooks and histories of the United States. Arthur Holmes, Emma Willard, Hugh Garland, Jesse Spencer, and Richard Hildreth employed the term. By "era of good feelings" they meant the absence of party strife in a period sandwiched between two administrations memorable for acrimonious political clashes. They used it as a synonym for political tranquility. In their hands Monroe's era became a moment of suspended animation, a pale interlude. Holmes confessed that he found the period so placid that it verged on the colorless. He acknowledged that "the pen of the historian finds little to do save to record legislative action" that would assume significant proportions and agitate the Republic in more epochal times.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Centinel*, Feb. 26, Sept. 6, Sept. 13, 1817; *Niles' Weekly*, XXIV (July 12, 1823), 292.

<sup>4</sup> Most writers dropped the "s" from good feelings by 1850. For a century this was the common usage. Arthur Holmes, *Parties and their Principles, a Manual of Political Intelligence, exhibiting the Origin, Growth, and Character of National Parties*, New York, 1859, 87. Miss Willard's textbook commented that Monroe's administration was a period of "profound peace" in which the country reduced taxes, liquidated the national debt, pushed its boundaries to the Pacific, acquired Florida, improved the Army, and recognized South American independence. "The voice of party spirit had died away, and the period is still spoken of, as the 'era of good feeling.'" Emma Willard, *History of the United States, or Republic of America: with a Chronology Table and a Series of Progressive Maps*, New York, 1855, 371. Garland thought the "good feeling" was the result of the blending of parties. Hugh A. Garland, *The Life of John Randolph of Roanoke*, 11th ed., New York, 1856, II, 114-115. Spencer termed Monroe's administration "unusually successful, so much so as to be termed 'the era of good feeling.'" Jesse Spencer, *History of the United States, from the Earliest Period to the Administration of President Johnson*, New York, 1866, III, 348. Hildreth credited Monroe's visit to New England as paving the way for "that complete amalgamation of parties which took place a few years later." Richard Hildreth, *The History of the United States of America*, New York, 1876, VI, 623.

Historians of the late nineteenth century particularly favored the phrase—hackneyed even then—and used it unsparingly. They perpetuated the placid-political-interlude interpretation. Alexander Johnston, professor of political economy at Princeton, gave "the era of good feelings" its classical definition. He marked 1817 to 1823 as the limits of the era, which he described as a period "when contests of national parties were practically suspended, partly through the exhaustion of one party (the federal party), and partly through the extinction of the surface issues of the past." In this interpretation the War of 1812 had swept away "traditional" political issues, and the uncontested election of 1820 signified the crest of the subsequent "good feeling." Implicit in this explanation was the assumption that political parties were negative quantities in governmental processes and their absence or liquidation thereby inaugurated a golden era in United States history.<sup>5</sup>

After the turn of the century some historians began to alter the definition of the time-honored phrase. They equated "good feeling" with "national feeling" and hailed the political calm as a manifestation of nationalism. Frederick J. Turner referred to the "joyous outburst of nationalism" that succeeded the war tensions and scattered the embers of bitter factionalism. But this was a "deceptive" and "superficial" calm veiling latent sectional antagonisms that later flared into discord. In much the same vein Carl Russell Fish pictured the Monroe administration as a "transitional period" filled with petty politics and sectional frictions that took the place of

<sup>5</sup> Johnston wrote that "party feeling was laid aside, and the leaders of both parties joined in receiving the president and in announcing the arrival of an 'era of good feeling.' The 'good feeling' lasted long enough to give Monroe an almost unanimous re-election in 1820 . . ." Alexander Johnston, "Era of Good Feeling," John J. Lalor, ed., *Cyclopaedia of Political Science, Political Economy, and the Political History of the United States*, Chicago, 1883, II, 108-109. Similar interpretations appeared in Edward Stanwood, *A History of Presidential Elections*, 3rd ed., rev., Cambridge, Mass., 1892, 70; John Fiske, *A History of the United States for Schools*, Cambridge, Mass., 1894, 298; James Schouler, *History of the United States of America, under the Constitution*, rev. ed., New York, 1894, III, 11-12; Edward Channing, *The United States of America 1765-1865*, New York, 1896, 196-197; *Harper's Encyclopaedia of United States History from 458 A. D., to 1902*, New York, 1902, III, 251. The milk-and-honey interpretation was so deeply entrenched in the public mind that a burlesque history referred to the period as "The Era of Good Will; or, Monroe's Nesting," and caricatured it as filled with "the uneventful, unproductive felicities" that disappointed those questing after "historical sensations." "After the showery storm of Madison's aquatic epoch, rainbows came out in millennial blendings. Warm sunshine lay upon the land." John D. Sherwood, *The Comic History of the United States, from a Period prior to the Discovery of America to Times Long Subsequent to the Present*, 2nd ed., Boston, 1881, 396.

regularly organized party contests. Homer Hockett cited the Boston *Centinel's* encomium as evidence of the "widespread sentiment of nationalism." The "appearance of calm" in the 1820 election, said Hockett, was "an illusion" soon exploded by personal and sectional conflicts.<sup>6</sup>

Recent historians would alter the traditional phrase. Fish was willing to rename it the "Era of Factional Conflict." James Truslow Adams would re-christen it "the era of slack water, of pause before new and violent controversies," and Herbert Agar termed it a period of "intense bad feelings." More recently George Dangerfield concluded that the political feelings during Monroe's administration while high were "invariably not good." Dangerfield whittled the duration of good feelings to two brief years, the honeymoon period of Monroe's first term, ending with the panic of 1819. Two years, Dangerfield conceded, did not constitute an "era", but rather than discard the troublesome phrase he adopted it as the title of a book covering the administration of John Q. Adams as well as that of James Monroe.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the phrase gained currency among historians largely concerned with political history, and it clung with the fastness of a cliché long after subsequent historians had demolished the conventional definition.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \* \*

<sup>6</sup> The long and habitual absence of the final "s" on good feelings probably encouraged the equation of "good feeling" and "national feeling." Frederick J. Turner, *Rise of the New West 1819-1829*, New York, 1906, 4, 6, 172, 265; Carl Russell Fish, *The Development of American Nationality*, New York, 1913, 128; Homer Hockett, *Political and Social History of the United States 1492-1828*, New York, 1925, 390-392.

<sup>7</sup> Fish, *The Development of American Nationality*, 128; James Truslow Adams, *History of the United States*, New York, 1933, II, 103; Herbert Agar, *Pursuit of Happiness; the Story of American Democracy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1938, 98; George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings*, New York, 1952, xi, xii, 91, 104. The older interpretation has not entirely slipped away. A recent dictionary of American history asserts that the name "Era of Good Feeling [sic]...indicates the absence of political conflict." Michael Martin and Leonard Gelber, ed., *The New Dictionary of American History*, New York, 1952, 197. In *The Age of Jackson*, Boston, 1945, 19, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., refers to "the benign atmosphere of the Era of Good Feelings."

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps one reason for the endurance of the phrase is its convenience as a chapter title. It has been used by Edward Stanwood, *A History of Presidential Elections*, chapter 10; James Truslow Adams, *History of the United States*, II, chapter 4; Samuel E. Morison and Henry C. Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic*, I, chapter 21. Ray Allen Billington, et al., used it as a paragraph title in *The United States; American Democracy in World Perspective*, New York, 1947, 139. Harry J. Carman and Harold C. Syrett prefer "Era of Good and Bad Feelings," *A History of the American People*, New York, 1952, I, 351.



The *Centinel's* casual use of "era" and "good feelings" reflected a different frame of reference than that which political historians later applied to the terms. In a different sense the period encompassing Monroe's administration *was* one of good feelings. Men of that day were not as deeply concerned about the political consequences of good feelings as they were about the religious and social implications of the term. The period following the War of 1812 was an era of good feelings in the sense of "benevolence," whose Latin roots enfolded the signification of good feelings.

"Benevolence" was a word widely used and possessed of special meaning for men of Monroe's day. Noah Webster defined it as the "disposition to do good; good will; kindness; charitableness; the love of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness." Webster was briefly paraphrasing the well defined theological doctrine of "disinterested benevolence" which called Calvinists to work for the extension of God's kingdom by performing good works based on "disinterested" motives. In the late 1700's Samuel Hopkins, disciple of Jonathan Edwards, taught that God's moral nature was selfless or disinterested love of his creatures. Conversely, selfishness was sin. To have any assurance of salvation individual men had to demonstrate that they shared in God's benevolent nature. Disinterested good works betokened an individual's inner worth. The element of the doctrine that gave it the quality of a socially dynamic imperative was Hopkins' yardstick for benevolence. According to Hopkins the measure of benevolence inherent in each act was the extent to which the deed helped to increase the "public good." The truly benevolent person, taught Hopkins, valued his own happiness second to the general welfare and would, if necessary, willingly yield his own interests to those of the public good. To Hopkins the goal of benevolence was simply "the greatest good of the whole."<sup>9</sup>

The doctrine of benevolence constituted a powerful call for good works beneficial to society. In the late 1790's and early 1800's the response took the form of several self-styled "benevolent" societies. They worked to spread Christianity and civilization through

<sup>9</sup> Noah Webster, comp., *An American Dictionary of the English Language* . . . , New York, 1828, n.p.; Samuel Hopkins, *The System of Doctrines, contained in Divine Revelation, Explained and Defended* . . . , 2nd ed., Boston, 1811, I, 465-477; Oliver W. Elsbree, "Samuel Hopkins and his Doctrine of Benevolence," *The New England Quarterly*, VIII, 534-550. In illustrating the correct usages of "benevolence" Webster echoed Hopkinsian theology. "The benevolence of God is one of his moral attributes; that attribute which delights in the happiness of intelligent beings."



the world. The most typical organization was the domestic missionary society, such as the Connecticut, Massachusetts, or New York Missionary Societies. For them good works consisted of spreading Protestant teachings and combating the *bête noire* of eighteenth century orthodoxy—infidelity. These associations dispatched missionaries to the West to distribute Bibles and religious tracts and to take a census of religious habits among frontiersmen, Indians, and soldiers of the American army, "that sinkhole of infidelity." No less vigorously prosecuted were foreign missions to the heathen of India, "Owyhee," Ceylon, Smyrna, and Palestine. The great American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions began operations in 1810. Bible, Sunday school, and religious tract societies all aided in spreading orthodoxy over the nation. In the years just prior to Monroe's election these religious associations were growing with extraordinary rapidity. Bible societies, for example, beginning with a score of local associations before the War of 1812, by 1817 had multiplied five or six times and continued to proliferate in the next decade.<sup>10</sup>

As Monroe prepared to step into the executive place poverty plagued thousands of Americans. In Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, and other towns, the hard times of 1816 and 1817 brought unemployment and distress. In the spring of 1817, a Baltimore paper spoke of the "horrors" of the preceding winter, and a group of Philadelphians asserted that the city had become an "emporium of beggars."<sup>11</sup> The hard times induced the creation of a large number of benevolent societies more secular in nature and avowedly devoted to the salvation of society. This second wave of benevolent associations, coinciding with Monroe's first term and receiving further impetus from the general depression of 1819 and after, consisted of a galaxy of local societies. They attempted to combat the "evils" of indigence and destitution.

<sup>10</sup> Colin B. Goodykoontz, *Home Missions on the American Frontier*, Caldwell, Idaho, 1939, 115-214; Oliver W. Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America 1790-1815*, Williamsport, Penn., 1928, *passim*; New York *Christian Herald*, I (June 16, 1816), 187-192. In 1815 the Presbyterian General Assembly exclaimed that Bible societies "are multiplying daily. Scarcely can there be discovered any considerable portion of settled country in these States, where some association of this kind is not either organized, or about to be organized."

<sup>11</sup> *Federal Republican and Baltimore Telegraph*, n.d., quoted in Poulson's Daily American Advertiser, April 25, 1817; John B. McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States, from the Revolution to the Civil War*, New York, 1914, IV, 526.

During the hard times of 1816 and 1817 the "evil" most feared was pauperism and circumstances considered as contributory to pauperism. Chief among these was intemperance. Various communities established moral societies, societies for suppressing vice and immorality, societies for the prevention of pauperism, and societies for suppressing intemperance. Supporters of these societies avowed that intemperance directly contributed to pauperism. In 1816 the Society for Suppressing Vice and Immorality in Portland, Maine, reported that seventy-one of the eighty-five inmates of the Portland workhouse "became paupers in consequence of intemperance. . . ." The *Boston Recorder* commented that two-thirds of the \$6,000 annually expended by Portland, a town of 5,000, went to "support the victims of intemperance." From this the editor estimated that Massachusetts spent more than \$400,000 yearly "for neglecting to enforce the Laws against intemperance" and that the total for the nation was four million dollars. These sums, he said, far surpassed the regular state budget and were larger than the federal liquor tax, direct tax, and expenses of Washington's first administration. Taking Portland as "a fair specimen of the country at large," the *Boston Recorder* concluded that "intemperance is the immediate cause of the heaviest tax which is paid by the people." The lesson was simple. "... Efficient Moral Societies in every town in the United States would be worth Four Million Dollars per annum to the country."<sup>12</sup>

In the larger cities fuel-saving, debtors, and provident societies organized in an attempt to teach economy to the poor and secure employment for the unemployed. Women formed special auxiliaries or operated separate associations for widows, orphans, deaf-mutes, and other distressed groups. Dorcas societies distributed clothing. In New York city women operated organizations with such self-explanatory titles as the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, Society for the Promotion of Industry, Society for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, and the Female Association for the Relief of the Sick Poor and for the Education of Such Female Children as do not belong to or are not provided for, by any Religious Society. A special committee in New York city estimated that one-seventh of the population was living on

<sup>12</sup> *Boston Recorder*, June 5, 1816. For an example of a society for the prevention of pauperism, see Blanche D. Coll, "The Baltimore Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, 1820-1822," *The American Historical Review*, LXI (October, 1955), 77-87.

charity. A great portion of these, it said, were victims of intemperance.<sup>13</sup>

The various societies grew so quickly that in Philadelphia a group of citizens feared that excessive benevolence only encouraged pauperism. They formed the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Public Economy to examine the situation. A similar group in New York city blamed drink, lotteries, pawnbrokers, and the numerous charitable institutions as major causes of pauperism.<sup>14</sup>

During the hard times of 1816 and 1817 Sabbath and Lancasterian schools for children of the lower classes received closer examination. "The Lancasterian system," noted one newspaper, "early impresses a sense of right and wrong, of order, cleanliness, subordination and obedience, an abhorrence of profane speaking, of lying, thieving, and every mode of deception. . . ." The same newspaper credited the absence of capital executions in one English county to the fact that general education had prevailed there. An advocate of Sabbath schools noted that Joseph Lancaster had drawn his students from "the lowest classes of society" and not one of the 4,000 ever stood charged with a criminal offense.<sup>15</sup>

Closely related to the growing interest in benevolent associations was the rise of the religious newspaper. In Massachusetts champions of orthodoxy Jedediah Morse and Jeremiah Evarts, editor of the *Panoplist*, the official organ of the American Board, urged Morse's son Sidney Edward Morse and Nathaniel Willis to establish a weekly journal devoted to religious news. On January 3, 1816, the *Boston Recorder* began publication. Morse based the *Recorder's* existence on the assumption that with the defeat of Napoleon's scheme "to reduce the world under one gigantic despotism" and the declining role of politics "the resources of the age" were seeking new channels. Morse pointed to "plans of the most extended benevolence" springing up in the United States and Europe as the heralds

<sup>13</sup> New York *Christian Herald*, I (April 27, 1816), 65; McMasters, *A History of the People of the United States*, IV, 527.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 526, 529. The Baltimore Society for the Prevention of Pauperism listed drink, lotteries, bawdy houses, and charitable institutions as the "most obtrusive causes" of pauperism. Quoted by Coll, "Baltimore Society for the Prevention of Pauperism," *The American Historical Review*, LXI, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 22, 1816; Moses Stuart, *A Sermon, Delivered by Request of the Female Charitable Society in Salem at their Anniversary the First Wednesday in August, A. D., 1815*, Andover, Mass., 1815, 17-18.

of a "new era" in world history. "Politics are not the supreme concern of man," Morse's prospectus asserted.<sup>16</sup>

The *Boston Recorder* threw itself into the benevolent movement. In the next months it promoted the causes of various Bible, Sunday school, and missionary societies. It traced the activities of missionaries in Africa, India, and New Zealand. It printed the reports of numerous charitable organizations forming all over the north. The *Recorder* boasted that it carried news items "to occupy the thoughts and to interest the feelings of every real philanthropist." It also noted that several journals "whose columns are principally occupied with religious articles" now found public favor. It accepted the rapid-order establishment of the *New Haven Religious Intelligencer*, *New York Christian Herald*, *Philadelphia Religious Remembrancer*, *Richmond Christian Monitor*, and *Chillicothe Weekly Recorder* as "indications of a favorable change in the taste of the community." In addition the *Recorder* estimated that at least fifteen and perhaps twenty newspapers that had hitherto ignored religious matters now dedicated regular columns to "Religious Intelligence." A year later the *Recorder's* publisher complained that the unexpected "multiplication of religious newspapers" had severely cut into his own patronage.<sup>17</sup>

And the list was still growing. In Baltimore the editors of the *Federal Republican*, a Federalist organ, deplored "the din of this eternal smithery" and slapped rancorous Federalist extremists who thought "that the welfare of our country for centuries to come, ought to be governed by an Indian resentment, who when he expires, bequeaths to his successor nothing but his vermine and his tomahawk." The editors asked readers to remember that beneath party differences they were all Christians, and Christianity, they asserted, was not divorced from politics. They announced that they planned to establish a weekly religious paper entitled the *Christian Messenger*. On the eve of Monroe's visit to Boston the *Recorder*, pointing to the rapidly growing benevolent movement exclaimed "surely this is an 'age of benevolence,' an 'age of missions,' an 'age of wonders.'" <sup>18</sup>

In 1817 Americans could count hundreds of local benevolent associations that had not existed two or three years earlier. With newspaper support these continued to grow. The general depres-

<sup>16</sup> *Boston Recorder*, Jan. 3, 1816.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, June 12, 1816, April 1, May 13, 1817.

<sup>18</sup> *Federal Republican*, n.d., quoted by Poulson's *American Daily Advertiser*, June 20, 1817; *Boston Recorder*, March 18, May 13, 1817.

sion in 1820-1821 encouraged the formation of more benevolent associations. Meanwhile, the older associations, the Bible, Sunday school, tract, and missionary societies, multiplied. They stood at the threshold of a new and far more dynamic phase of development. In the space of a few years after Monroe took the oath of office several of the largest benevolent associations metamorphosed from local and regional societies into national or "American" organizations. Their ramiform auxiliaries inched into most communities and relayed substantial incomes to the parent organizations. In this period the American Bible Society, American Tract Society, American Education Society, American Sunday School Union, American Temperance Society, American Colonization Society, and the American Peace Society all came into existence.<sup>19</sup>

The political doldrums of 1817 did not constitute an "era" in the sense of an historical age, and "good feelings," such as they were, did not reign long in the field of politics. As such the "era of good feelings" is a misnomer. In the realm of social and religious history "good feelings" was a theologically and socially forceful principle that called forth an extensive number of voluntary, humanitarian societies. These especially flourished in Monroe's day. Spurred by the hard times of 1816 and after, a multitude of local groups attempted to meet the challenge of poverty and its effect on society. The public prints were full of benevolent activities, and the benevolent society movement constituted an era in social and religious history. Defined in these terms the "era of good feelings" deserves retention in the idiom of United States history.

P. J. STAUDENRAUS

University of Wisconsin

<sup>19</sup> John R. Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues 1812-1848*, Princeton, 1954, 20.



## Book Review

*Alexis de Tocqueville: The Critical Years 1848-1851.* By Edward T. Gargan. The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D. C., 1955. Pp. xii, 324. Paper. \$3.50.

The intelligent Frenchman of noble birth who spent nine months of 1831 in the United States on a mission studying penal reform and then returned to his native land to write his brilliant and penetrating *Democracy in America*, later entered national politics in France, and finally went back to his studies in an effort to analyze the causes of the French Revolution. To the experience of travel, statesmanship, and historical study Tocqueville brought a keenly analytical and reflective mind. It is upon his participation in the Revolution of 1848, his service as foreign minister in the cabinet of Odilon Barrot (June-October, 1849), and his attitude toward the assault upon the Second Republic by Louis Napoleon that Professor Gargan centers his research.

Not satisfied simply to narrate Tocqueville's life during these crucial years the author has reached out to connect thought with action, to compare Tocqueville's analysis of political, social, and economic institutions with those of Marx. This is an extremely worthwhile but difficult objective but one which Professor Gargan has achieved. The finished product is careful scholarship distilled through two questioning intellects.

Perhaps the highest tribute one can pay to Tocqueville and Professor Gargan is that this study forces the reader into a reflective mood where the Revolutionary tradition of France must be pondered against the timeless conflict between tradition and change.

Tocqueville, a man more aware of the intimate relationships between politics and social reform than most of his contemporaries, a man who believed governmental centralization frustrated individual liberty, a moderate who understood the delicacy of the balance between personal liberty and economic well being for the masses, never succeeded in bridging the gap between the world his intellect created and the one in which he lived. As a person who understood the almost impossible demands ideal democracy imposed upon the citizenry, yet a believer in political liberty, he found himself irretrievably caught between the authoritarian tradition and the politically unconscious masses in an age when education of the higher quality was restricted to the socially privileged.

Professor Gargan's indefatigable effort to place Tocqueville the active statesman and Tocqueville the thinker into the mid-nineteenth-century complex of facts and ideas provides us with a rich harvest. It strikes one reader that Tocqueville combined some of the characteristics of Montesquieu with those of the Girondin leaders of 1792 though unlike the latter he would not attempt to make the Revolution international in scope. His case, that of a nineteenth-century moderate who saw the significance of the changes being wrought by industrialization without being able to formulate a working program to accommodate them, once again demonstrates that the wise man dedicated to humanity is often frustrated and defeated in his own time yet is sometimes appreciated by future generations more wary of quick solutions.

RICHARD M. BRACE

Northwestern University